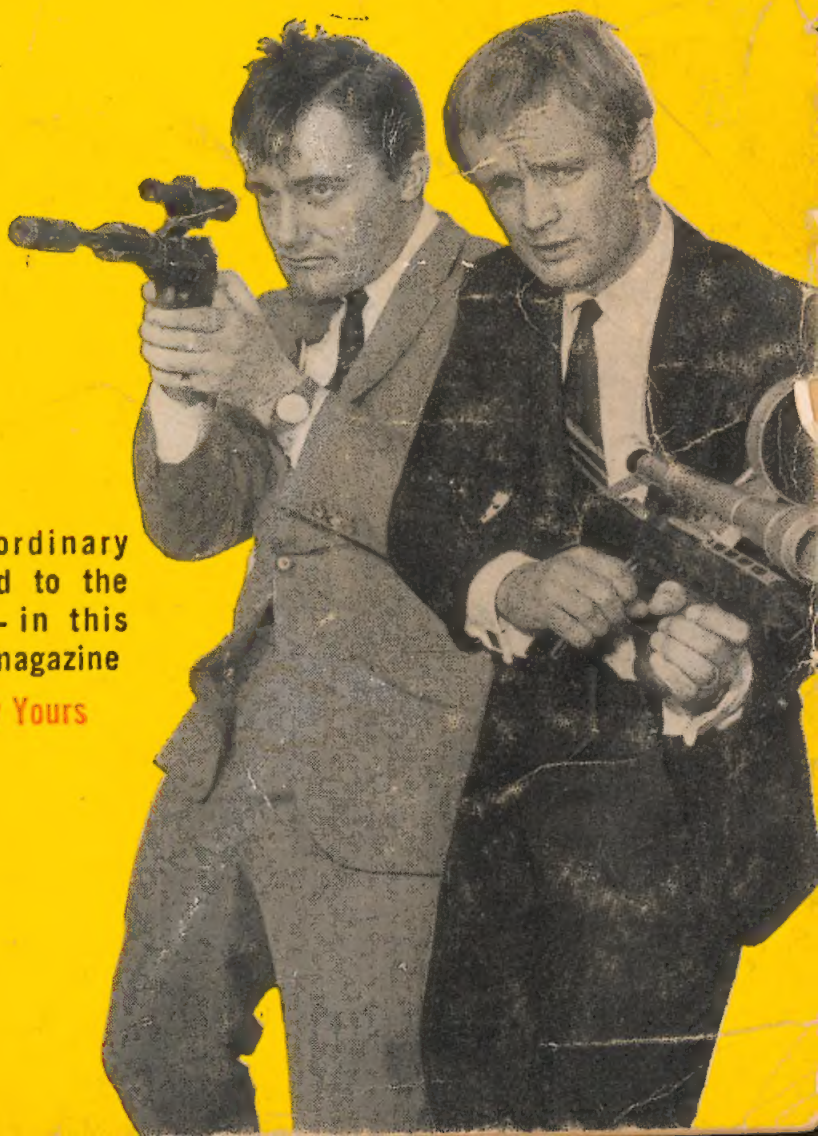
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 50c PDC

NAPOLEON SOLO ILLYA KURYAKIN



THE HOWLING TEENAGERS AFFAIR

First of Their Extraordinary Adventures — Dedicated to the Destruction of Evil — in this NEW spy and suspense magazine

Complete and Exclusively Yours

NAPOLEON SOLO

ILLYA KURYAKIN

NOW — *In Their Very Own*
NEW — NEW — NEW — Monthly Magazine.

IT IS WITH pardonable pride that we announce a brand new magazine, which will feature and star the now famous characters of MGM-Arena's top-ranking television show "The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

Each year some new show, some new star captures the TV fancy and rockets to fame. Last year, beyond any question of doubt, "The Man from U.N.C.L.E. walked away with all the ratings, to take its place firmly at the top of all crime-adventure video shows.

Now, for the first time and exclusively yours, we announce the first issue of THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE.

Each issue will headline and star MGM's famous trio of man-hunters, ILLYA KURYAKIN, NAPOLEON SOLO and ALEXANDER WAVERLY in a brand new full length novel written and created especially for this magazine. Each issue will feature and co-star top ranking stories by internationally famous authors. Each issue will, we firmly believe, establish a new, exciting milestone in the field of espionage-adventure reading entertainment.

The first big novel, "The Howling Teenagers Affair," is a truly outstanding drama. We feel assured of two things: You won't put this story down unfinished. And—you'll never forget it!

We hope you will be as excited about this new landmark of magazine thrills as we are. We think you will be.

Good reading to you!

Leo Margulies

Publisher

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

NAPOLEON SOLO · ILLYA KURYAKIN

FEBRUARY, 1966 Vol. 1, No. 1

NEW FULL LENGTH U.N.C.L.E NOVEL

THE HOWLING TEENAGERS AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

One day they had given U.N.C.L.E. to overcome a terrible THRUSH weapon—an army of mindless monsters—who killed with a smile.

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LEO MARGULIES
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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE, VOL. 1, No. 1. February, 1966. Published monthly by Leo Margulies Corp. 160 W. 46th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, 12 issues $6.00; 24 issues $12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious © 1966, by Leo Margulies Corp. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 160 W. 46th St., New York, New York. 10036

YOU WON'T PUT DOWN THIS COMPELLING NOVEL—NOR WILL YOU EVER FORGET IT!

THE HOWLING TEENAGERS AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo had one last day to find and destroy THRUSH's new deadliest weapon—an army of mindless monsters who killed with a smile—and died laughing!

ACT I—THE MADNESS METHOD

VIOLENT DEATH hung in the morning air. It rose with the mist over the great river that flowed past the shining white new city. The rumble in the distance grew louder, a sound like an express train moving closer. The police and thin line of British-uniformed, American-armed troops were in their places around the perimeter of the airfield at the edge of the city in the morning sun.

The twin-engined aircraft circled the field once and prepared for the landing.

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FEATURING

NAPOLEON SOLO and ILLYA KURYAKIN

The distant rumble grew closer. The gently descending aircraft touched down. The morning mist began to burn off.

The police and soldiers lounged easily in their thin line, joked, pointed toward the approaching rumble that shook the ground, and laughed. They were not worried. This was Africa. The new Africa, but still Africa. The Zulus of Tchaka had roamed across this land, beating their *assegais* against their shields to frighten the enemy before they ever appeared to do battle with them.

The approaching mob was doing the same thing, and the police and soldiers were not frightened. They had been through this before. Only as a formality they held their weapons ready as the first of the mob advanced along the road from the city.

The twin-engined aircraft rolled to a stop and the door opened. A massive, broad-shouldered man stepped out and stood at the head of the movable stairs. His white teeth flashed in the morning sun. He was taller than the nervous men around him, like some great Zulu chief himself.

At the edge of the field the first wave of the mob made contact with the police and troops. The police and troops held them back, smiling but striking out with clubs and gun butts where necessary. The troops and police smiled, because they had suddenly seen that the entire mob was made up of the young, the teenagers of this emerging new nation.

The tall, broad-shouldered man stepped down the movable stairway and reached the field itself. He started across, his bodyguards trotting to keep up with him.

"Vive le Presidente!" voices shouted.

Suddenly, the mob seemed twice its size. The police stopped smiling. The soldiers battled. Howling, the mob of teenagers smashed through the thin line of guards. Sirens wailed in the distance as reinforcements approached for the outmanned police.

The mob did not wait. Roaring like wild animals, screaming, hysterical, they poured over the line of guards.

Engulfed by the wave of suddenly distorted faces, the sea of wild eyes, the police and troops had no chance.

The teenagers swept across the open air field like the ancient Zulu warriors.

Alone and tall, the president of the new country stood in the center of the field.

His bodyguards, everything forgotten now but the safety of their chief, fired their machine-guns directly into the advancing mob. The first wave of the roaring mob went down. Blood spurted across the earth of the field. Screams of pain filled the air. Legs and arms kicked, writhed on the ground.

But the mob did not stop, did not pause, did not hesitate even one split second.

The bodyguards fired again, held down the triggers, the barrels of their sub-machine guns turning red.

The mob swept on.

Like the great ocean itself the mob of howling teenagers rolled across the field.

And then the mob passed on toward the distant edge of the open field and the dark jungle.

Behind them they left thirty of their own dead; they left a hundred wounded and writhing. They left the bodyguards trampled and groaning, the police and troops dazed and wounded. They left the twin-engined aircraft leaning crazily on one smashed wing.

And they left the tall president lying on his face, dead, with a long knife plunged into his back.

* * *

The Palladium in London rocked to the screams of the teenagers. On the lighted platform stage four young men sang, twisted, strummed guitars, banged the drums.

The young people screamed with delight. They laughed, clapped, sighed. Their bright young faces were excited with the beat of the music, the words of the singers.

One tall boy, his hair streaming out behind him, dove from the balcony. His bloody head lay smashed against a seat below.

* * *

The complete novels depicting the amazing adventures of Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakim and the rest of the famous cast of characters making up the great organization known as United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—are especially written, entirely brand-new and inspired by the exciting MGM-ARENA television series—"The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

In Sydney, Australia, the police answered a call. Citizens complained that there was a noisy party disturbing the peace. When the police arrived in the rich suburb all was silent. Cautiously the police approached the house. Inside, in the basement playroom, they found the dead bodies of twenty-two teenagers.

"Poison?" the detective said. "All of them?"

"Every one. And self-inflicted without a doubt. They all have the glasses near them."

"Mass suicide?" the detective said, unbelieving, staring.

* * *

The laboratory lay in burned, smoldering ruins. Captain Parker of the Chicago police stood beside the director of the laboratory.

"They were picketing—nothing unusual," the director said. "They know we are working on military research. Peace groups often picket us."

"Then they went wild?" the captain of Chicago police said.

"All at once, just before quitting

time, the twenty of them became two hundred, perhaps three hundred. They broke into the building and set it on fire."

"All teenagers? Every one?"

"All," the director said. "And the plans for the nuclear fuse are gone."

* * *

On a side street in the Soho section of London a mob of young people blocked the path of an armored car. The driver and two guards got out to clear them off. The driver and both guards died later of multiple injuries from their beating. Two million dollars in gold bullion vanished.

* * *

The beach near Santa Barbara, California, was deserted when the sixteen boys and girls, all under eighteen years of age, walked into the sea and swam out of sight. They were never seen again.

"Like lemmings," the highway patrol officer said.

Bodies washed ashore all week.

* * *

In Red Square, Moscow, the police failed to hold back the horde of long-haired youths when the deputy chief of security of the Polish Peoples' Republic came to visit the tomb of Lenin. The police were reprimanded. The square was cleared by troops. Six of the teenagers died, and twenty went to prison.

But the deputy chief of security of the Polish Peoples Republic was dead.

TWO

NAPOLEON SOLO looked deep into her eyes. Violet eyes, like deep, liquid marbles, pools of beauty. She was curled like a kitten at the end of a long, soft couch. Solo's smile was easy, youthful as he looked into those violet eyes.

"How do you do it, Maxine?" Solo whispered into her ear. "Be almost six feet tall and curl up into a powder puff—such a pretty powder puff?"

"Mirrors," Maxine Trent whispered back. "I do it all with mirrors."

"Not all with mirrors, I hope," Solo said softly.

"All, Napoleon Solo," she said. "I'm an illusion. I'm only a mirror myself. If you touch me, *poof!*"

Solo sighed. "The story of my life, *poof!*"

"Will you risk it? Touching me?" Maxine whispered.

"For you, I risk anything," Solo said.

"Go on! Go on!"

Solo leaned closer to her. The room—her room—was silent. The music that had been playing was gone now, the record player turning itself off automatically at just the right instant. Solo almost smiled; for his purposes he could not have done it better himself. A very cooperative record player.

Too cooperative?

The sixth sense, the warning, went off in his brain. The split-second sensitivity to danger, even to potential danger, that had kept him alive longer than any chief enforcement agent U.N.C.L.E. had ever had. Was it coincidence, the record player stopping at just the precise instant he was about to bend down and kiss her?

He leaned close to her, smiling, her perfume in his nostrils. His eyes looked into her eyes. Behind his boyish, ardent smile, his mind went to work. He ran Maxine Trent through his mind like a card through a computer: Age 24; 5 foot 11 inches and all the right measurements to go with the height; a runner-up for Miss America one year; daughter of industrialist Clark Trent; known to like action and—danger. Introduced to Solo two weeks ago by John Knox, a young business executive Solo cultivated to hide his true occupation.

His true occupation was chief enforcement agent for United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—U.N.C.L.E. And U.N.C.L.E. was a supra-national organization sworn to somehow keep the world safe and, if possible, sane. Any enemy of any peaceful and honest person in the world was the enemy of U.N.C.L.E. It was hard work, dangerous work. Now Solo wondered if the danger were close here, in the arms of Maxine Trent.

"Well, Napoleon," Maxine said.

"I heard you were a man of action. You certainly don't call this action —yet?"

Solo smiled. "You'd be surprised, my dear."

He was about to say more when the signal went off. A low sound, rising and falling, like a miniature version of the wailing horn of a Parisian police car. Solo reached quickly into the inside pocket of his coat and switched off the signal on the miniature radio set.

Maxine blinked up at him from the couch as he stood up.

"You're not leaving—*now?*" she whispered.

"I am afraid I am," Solo said. "A previous appointment, my little alarm reminded me. Some other time we can pick it up, yes?"

She stared at him. He was a slender man of medium height. He was neither handsome nor ugly. A pleasant, friendly face that was usually smiling. His dark, brooding eyes were at the same time quick and bright. Intense eyes, but not hard and not jaded. Eyes that smiled an apology to Maxine now, yet were already seeing something else.

He turned quickly and walked to the door. The speed of the motion gave a slight indication of the strong, trained athlete's body concealed in his slender frame. What he lacked in size he more than made up for in catlike speed, in skill, and in training. He seemed no different from the thousands of young executives, budding doctors, youthful professional men, and wealthy, if idle, playboys. He could have been anything from a tennis bum to a first echelon government man.

Solo was none of those things. He was a man trained to kill with a single blow of his innocent-seeming hand.

Once in the corridor of Maxine Trent's apartment house, Solo turned quickly left and walked to the fire stairs. He went through the door and down and out into the midtown Manhattan street. It was late afternoon, and the streets were crowded.

Solo walked a block, blended with the crowd. Only then did he take his small chrome metal and plastic sender-receiver set from out of his pocket.

He quickly raised the two threadlike antennae, pressed a button on the instrument that fitted in the palm of his hand, and spoke low into it.

"Solo here."

"Report to Mr. Waverly at once. Code Mayday," the crisp female voice of the radio communications girl said.

Solo clicked off his set, returned it to his pocket, and began to Walk casually but quickly across town toward the East River and U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

* * *

Illya Kuryakin ran his thin fingers through his thatch of unkempt

blond hair. The small, thin Russian muttered to himself in Danish, which happened to be the language of the book he was intently puzzling over.

The private library was as quiet as a tomb. Kuryakin was one of the two persons in the small, book-lined room. The other was an old man whose clothes had seen better days, but whose thirst for knowledge was undiminished. From time to time the ancient female librarian came into the room. She glared at Illya, who she obviously considered far too young to be a scholar.

Illya smiled disarmingly at the harridan. With his blond, round-bowl haircut he looked like a mischievous Russian leprechaun; or a blond knight-errant, an impish modern-day Prince Valiant with straw hair. His bright and quick eyes danced beneath his seriously lowered brow. His glance at the old woman was quizzical and amused —an amusement that did not show on his face as he steadily looked up at her.

"Can I help you, madam?" Illya said to the librarian.

"I— I—" the woman stammered in confusion, caught staring at Illya.

Illya spoke softly. "I understand. You are wondering what so young a man is doing in a library on such a fine day?"

"I—"

Illya smiled. "You are wondering why I am studying so obscure a book about poisons? You wonder am I a spy, since I obviously read a foreign language. Ah, that is suspect, eh? A young man who reads a foreign language must be a spy at least, *nyet?* Ah, the young people today, such irresponsible animals, *nicht wahr?"*

"I—" the librarian blustered, and then turned scarlet as this wisp of a boy suddenly reached out and pinched her.

"Why, you—!"

Illya laughed.

"Well!" the librarian snapped, turned and stalked off.

Illya smiled once more, and returned to his work. This library was one of his favorite places to spend an afternoon in New York. A private library devoted to strange, half-known poisons, mysteries of ancient witchcrafts and other superstitions, all the half insane fears of the human mind. That was Illya's single purpose in his life— to try to dispel the insanity of man, to try to save the idiot world from itself.

For that purpose he had studied, learned fifteen languages, left the service of the country of his birth to work for what he truly considered the only sane group of people on earth—U.N.C.L.E.—United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.

For that purpose he still studied, trained his small but lithe body, devoted himself to the work. He had no interest in either command

or position, only in doing the job better than anyone. He had no time for such rewards and frills of the world as money, honors, fine living, or creature comfort.

The signal on his transmitter-receiver went off. Instantly Illya became the quick, serious agent of U.N.C.L.E. The old librarian was looking around in fury for the source of the strange wailing sound. Illya shut off the signal, raised the small plastic and metal box to his lips.

"Kuryakin here."

"Mr. Waverly wants you at once. Code Mayday," the voice of the communications girl said.

Illya replaced the tiny radio set in his pocket, returned his book to the desk, smiled winningly at the ancient librarian.

"Take very good care of the books, *liebchen,*" he hissed at the old woman.

He could almost hear her red-faced anger behind him as he walked out and down to the late afternoon New York street. Smiling to himself at his own joke, he did not see the old man in the decrepit clothes move with far greater speed than he should have been capable of at his age. He did not see the old man follow him.

But he heard the footsteps behind him on the stairs.

He reached the street and for an instant was out of sight of the footsteps behind him. He reached into his jacket pocket for the tiny radio, raised the threadlike antennae, pressed the sending button.

"Sonny, this is Bubba. I have a bandit in tow. Plan 9."

Illya pressed his receive button. Instantly the tiny transmitter-receiver whispered low to him.

"Bubba from Sonny. Possible bandit here, too. Plan 9."

The voice of Napoleon Solo faded. Illya walked on down the sunny street. In a store window he saw the figure of the old man behind him.

THREE

THERE IS A brownstone house on East 44th Street in Manhattan. It seems an innocent dwelling, with a small printing shop on the ground floor. A narrow alley runs beside it. The alley is a dead-end, or seems so, ending one hundred feet back from the street in a high brick wall topped with broken glass.

Approximately fifteen minutes after their whispered words over the miniature radio sets, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin approached the East 44th Street brownstone from opposite directions. They seemed intent on their own business, paid no attention to each other, and walked without looking back.

They seemed to meet as strangers at the mouth of the alley beside the innocent brownstone with its print shop. They both turned into the alley, nodding politely to each other,

and began to walk toward the blank high wall at the rear.

At this precise instant, the printing presses in the ground floor print shop began to operate. They were old presses, the windows of the press room were open, and the noise in the alley was deafening. Solo and Kuryakin walked on down the alley toward the blank wall as if oblivious to the shattering noise of the presses.

Behind them the old man from the private library jumped into the alley, a grim smile on his face as he heard the noise of the presses. The old man moved down the alley with a speed that proved he was far from old beneath his disguise. A heavy, wide-mouthed gun in his hand proved that he was not a scholar. He raised the gun, still grinning at the convenient noise of the presses that would hide any sound.

He never fired his strange gun.

The seemingly blank wall of the brownstone building opened abruptly. Two men stepped out. The pistols in their hands spat twice each, the noise totally covered by the sound of the printing presses.

The fake old man fell like a stone, his body stiff and rigid.

The two men who had shot him ran to him, picked him up and hustled him through the secret openings into the brownstone building. The wall closed.

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin walked on toward the rear wall.

The alley was silent except for the noise of the printing presses. There was not even a drop of blood on the stones to show that anything had happened. The *ersatz* old man who had followed Illya Kuryakin was not dead, merely paralyzed and sleeping from the effect of the darts fired from the special pistols of the two U.N.C.L.E. men of Section-V—Security and Personnel.

Solo and Illya continued to walk as if they had seen nothing until they reached the rear wall.

And vanished.

* * *

The beautiful woman lurked in the doorway of a building on East 45th Street. She watched as the young man came down the steps of another brownstone two doors up the street closer to the East River. She frowned. She had expected Napoleon Solo to be carrying something when he emerged.

Aware that the wail of his miniature radio had been a summons to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters, she had trailed him to the 44th Street brownstone. She had not gone up the alley; it was too convenient. Instead, she, Maxine Trent, had come around the block and been rewarded for her quick guessing by the appearance of Solo from another brownstone. But the U.N.C.L.E. agent was empty-handed.

Maxine stared at the figure of

Solo. The handsome young man was walking east toward the river. She sighed to herself, Napoleon was such a good-looking man; it was too bad that she would have to stop him now, and search him. He could easily be carrying what she wanted hidden somewhere on that slender but so nicely masculine body.

She left her refuge and followed down the street in the shadows of the buildings on the shaded side. She smiled to herself. U.N.C.L.E. was so proud of its security! Solo was sure no one could have followed *to* the building on 44th Street, and *from* the building on 45th Street.

The handsome fool was walking openly, carelessly.

Maxine had to hurry and move closer as people began to pour out of an office at the end of the block. She passed another set of brownstone steps, still smiling but hurrying. She never saw the small, blond man step out.

Illya caught her neck, pressed, and caught her inert body in his arms as she collapsed. She made no sound, lay totally unconscious in his arms.

The people crowded around him on the street. Some woman screamed. But no one had seen anything except a woman faint and fall into the arms of the nice, blond young man.

A policeman pushed through the crowd.

"I'm sorry, officer. My wife has these spells," Illya said.

"She just passed out," someone said.

"You need a doctor?" the policeman said helpfully.

"That's an excellent idea," Illya said. "If you wouldn't mind holding her, I'll find one at once."

Illya handed the inert form of Maxine Trent to the arms of the policeman, smiled, and walked away into the crowd. All the people looked at the nice young man with sympathy. Illya smiled sadly back at them as he turned the corner and vanished.

It was nearly twenty minutes before the policeman began to wonder about the nice young man.

* * *

There are four known entrances to the hidden complex of U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York. A maze of steel and bombproof concrete hides behind its innocent facade, which includes a tailor shop, the false offices of an international aid organization also called U.N.C.L.E., and a key-club type restaurant called *The Mask Club*. The stronghold has no stairs, only elevators, and has been penetrated only once. From that single penetration, no one in the attacking force survived.

To those who know, the headquarters can also be entered by water from the river through secret tunnels. But the main entrance, used by all but the few who can

never be seen going in, is *Del Floria's* tailor shop.

Del Floria himself is a tall, balding man in his fifties. He is a good tailor but he is also one of the best and quickest shots with any of the many weapons he has hidden close.

Del Floria is the keeper of the gate. He has been this, a key man in Section-V of U.N.C.L.E., for a long time. To enter the headquarters an enemy must pass him. This has never been done. The one penetration was made through the river entrances. Del Floria knows every U.N.C.L.E. member by sight, the only man below Section-I who does. He knows their faces, and no more. To know more would be his death warrant. Now he smiled as he greeted two old customers.

"If you would step into the fitting rooms, gentlemen," Del Floria said. "we can start fitting you."

Solo and Illya stepped through the curtain into the fitting room. Once inside, they waited a moment; then, on a signal from Del Floria that all was clear, they stepped into one of the many dressing rooms. They closed the curtain. The wall opened. They stepped through. The wall closed behind them.

They stood in the reception room of U.N.C.L.E.

The room was windowless, without doors of any kind. A pretty girl sat behind the reception desk. The controls on the desk top were unlabeled, unidentified. Only she knew which button did what, and the buttons were interchanged at irregular intervals. She looked like a receptionist in any office in the city. Her U.N.C.L.E. special was out of sight in its holster behind her back. She handed Solo and Illya their triangular identity badges.

Badges in place, they stepped toward a wall that opened miraculously. Without the badges there would now be a hundred alarms clanging, doors closing and sealing, armed men facing them from every angle. With the badges they walked straight ahead through doors that opened untouched, past doors that never would open without the proper signal. They walked on floors of steel, between walls of steel, and there were no windows anywhere.

They rode up two floors in a silent elevator. They emerged into another steel corridor. Again doors opened and they reached the end door of the corridor. This door was unmarked, exactly as all the other doors. A plain steel door with no way to tell that it was in any way different. But it was. This was the heart of U.N.C.L.E. operations in New York. The office of the chief, the office of one of only five men who formed Section-I—Policy and Operations.

The door opened. Solo and Illya stepped inside.

* * *

Alexander Waverly stood at an open window, absently tapping his empty pipe in his hand. Solo and

Illya stood behind him. The chief, the member of Section-I, seemed to be trying to think of something he wanted to say.

"He—uh—seemed to know nothing," Waverly said, without turning around. "The one who was following Mr. Kuryakin. They brought him around in Section-V but he could tell us nothing."

"THRUSH?" Napoleon Solo said.

"Yes, of course, Mr.—uh—Solo. Of course," Waverly said.

The Head of U.N.C.L.E. in New York turned now. Alexander Waverly looked, Illya Kuryakin had once said, like an aristocratic blood hound. Beneath a broad forehead and thinning but neat gray hair, bushy eyebrows stood out from a heavy brow. The eyes were sunken in deep sockets, heavily wrinkled at the corners, as if the man had spent many years squinting into the sun and wind of the world. Below the eyes Waverly's face drooped into a permanently serious expression. A face that never smiled, never frowned, never showed any expression but thought.

"And mine?" Solo said. "Maxine Trent?"

"She talked her way out of the hands of the law. She then eluded the Section-V man who followed her," Waverly said. "An entirely different cup of tea, the Trent woman."

Waverly seemed to be thinking of something a long time ago. It would have been hard for Solo or Illya to guess what it was. The background of Alexander Waverly was shrouded in an obscure mist. Beyond a rumor of fifty years service in British and American Intelligence, the manner of a man who had been born an aristocrat, the speech of an Englishman who had lived in many lands other than England, there was nothing known.

Just a man over sixty who wore tweeds and liked pipes, who could barely recall the names of his own agents, and who seemed always in a vaguely bumbling haze. A minor official who should have retired years ago. A man who, when it counted, had a memory like an elephant, a brain as quick as a scorpion and equally dangerous, a composure that never ruffled, and the ability to command men. A man who was very alone.

"Well," Waverly said. "I expect I sent for you gentlemen."

"Something THRUSH apparently knows about already," Illya said. "We weren't followed for nothing."

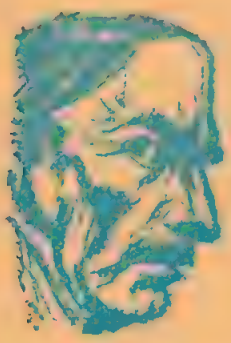
"Yes," Waverly said. "I dare say they know what I have to tell you. Not surprising. THRUSH Council members are well placed, as you know."

"How would they know it would be Illya and myself you would use this time?" Solo said.

"I believe they would assume that we would use our best men on something of this importance,"

Waverly said. And Waverly nodded to himself as if seeing the THRUSH council, his opponents in the perpetual chess game he played for the future of the world. "Yes, they would have learned we have been called in. They would properly try to stop us before we started."

"They appear to know more than we do," Illya said drily.



"Eh? Oh, yes, I imagine they do. We shall have to correct that now. You see, it appears that THRUSH has found a way to use, and perhaps destroy, the young people of the world."

FOUR

THEY WERE seated around the circular briefing table with the moving top. Waverly had pressed the button on his desk; a panel had slid back on the wall, revealing the screen. Now Illya, Solo and Waverly were watching the grey screen. Somewhere far off inside the complex of steel rooms the head of Communications and Research in Section III, the pretty and redheaded May Heatherly, operated the screen and the running commentary.

"This is the airfield at Kandaville, photographed a few minutes after the mob had gone. You will note the knife in the back of the president," the crisp, yet very female voice of May Heatherly said.

Solo noted the knife in the back of the dead president of the new country. But a corner of his mind thought of the very alive, very pretty May Heatherly. He sighed aloud. And smiled when he noted Waverly looking at him. His chief missed little—worse, understood him. Waverly knew precisely what Solo's sigh meant, and disapproved, and yet—

Sometimes Napoleon Solo was sure that Alexander Waverly still appreciated the young ladies.

"This is the body of the boy in London, taken just after the Palladium was cleared," the voice of May Heatherly went on.

Illya looked at the crushed head of the boy. His mind observed every detail. He frowned. There was nothing at all unusual, nothing he could see to go on. Just a dead boy of seventeen.

"This is the basement room in Sydney taken by the police when they arrived. There was no doubt of the verdict, mass suicide," May Heatherly's voice continued.

Solo and Illya looked at the twenty-two sprawled bodies, all *smiling* in death.

"Note the smiles," Waverly said. "Quite unusual."

In rapid succession the screen showed the burning laboratory in Chicago, the armored car and its dead guards in Soho, the beach near Santa Barbara, the dead deputy chief of security in Red Square. And there was more, much more. Waverly laid a report, two copies, on the table and swung the top until the copies were before Illya and Solo.

"The report is quite complete," Waverly said. "At least forty-seven other comparable incidents within the last three months."

Solo flipped through the report, scanning the acts and places.

"Teenagers are always rioting," Solo said.

"Quite true," Waverly said. "But there are some peculiarities. Miss—uh—Heatherly, will you run them again?"

The pictures flashed on the screen again one by one. Solo and Illya studied them intently in the silence of the office. They were horrible, sad. They were angering, wasteful.

"Note all the expressions of the teenagers, gentlemen, those who are in the pictures. You will notice the smiles, even on the dead. And observe the eyes—positively exhilarated, I should say."

"Manic," Illya said. "Almost insane."

"No, I think not insane. Look carefully. They are happy," Waverly pointed out. "It has been my experience that teenagers who have committed some act of violence or vandalism are characteristically frightened or at least subdued afterwards. Their natural insecurity returns after the impetus is gone. But these young people are still happy."

"Drugged?" Solo said.

"Not in the usual sense, I should say," Waverly said. "But I suspect some form of artificial stimulant—a most peculiar kind."

Illya leaned forward. "In what way, sir?"

Waverly did not answer at once. The older man patted at his tweed pockets as if searching for something. At last he drew out a pipe. Then he began to look for his tobacco. He continued his search as he talked.

"Well, it leaves no trace of how it was administered. It also leaves no trace in the body. They ran autopsies on all the dead children. Finally, it seems to have unpredictable effects."

"What do you mean exactly by unpredictable?" Illya said.

Waverly filled his pipe. "Possibly I should have the pictures run again for you, gentlemen. But in the interest of saving time, let me point out that in some of these cases there seems to be considerable method to the madness. I should think you could see—"

"The murder of the president," Illya said, "the stealing of the gold

bullion, the burning of that laboratory and the theft of the fuse plans, and—"

"And the killing of the deputy chief of security," Solo finished.

"Very good, gentlemen; I see all your training is not lost," Waverly said. "Yes, it is quite clear that in each of those cases random accident appears rather unlikely. Someone had much to gain in each instance. One such accident, yes. Two? Possible. Three, not really possible. Four, never."

"Mathematically all but impossible," Illya said. "Given the exact similarity of conditions—all teenage riots."

"What about the Russians?" Solo said. "Each of those cases was in the West except the deputy chief of security, and he was a Pole. It could have been some sort of purge."

Illya smiled. "Always ready to malign my poor countrymen."

"Your ex-countrymen," Solo pointed out.

Waverly cleared his throat, tapped out his never lighted pipe. "Let me say it is not the Russians. Our friends at the Kremlin are not cooperative with information, as you well know, but in this case we have reliable data to show that other such incidents have occurred in the Soviet. They are, I believe, quite as worried as the West."

"THRUSH?" Solo said.

"I think we can safely detect their fine hand in this, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "Especially since they appear to be out to stop us before we start. A sign, I believe, of the high priority nature of whatever scheme they have."

Waverly searched his tweed jacket for his tobacco pouch again. "In addition, our Section-I representative for Africa, with whom I had the pleasure of speaking this morning, has some other indications. It appears that the man who will step into the dead president's shoes out there may well be a THRUSH man. That would make the new country another THRUSH satrapy, I fear. In any event, each case would benefit THRUSH in its work enormously."

There was a silence in the office. They were all thinking of the work of THRUSH. That supra-national organization, almost a nation of its own, had only one work—to dominate the world, to have the only power. To this end THRUSH had already invaded the body politic of the earth like some insidious virus. Everywhere on earth, high places and low, there were men who seemed to belong to various nations, but who, in fact, belonged to only one nation—THRUSH.

These men lived complete double lives, whether they were taxi-drivers or cabinet ministers. Their rank in the visible world did not necessarily coincide with their THRUSH rating. A taxi-driver in New York could be a leader of THRUSH ; a cabinet minister in Peru could be no more than a com-

mon soldier. At the head of THRUSH was the council—great men all, in both worlds: soldiers, industrialists, politicians, scientists.

Illya Kuryakin leaned forward across the circular table, his dark eyes fixed on Waverly. "I can understand the cases where THRUSH has something to gain. But what about the other incidents? Were they mistakes of THRUSH?"

"Possibly," Waverly agreed.

"Or a cover," Solo said. "Intended to hide the real incidents where they gained."

"Possibly," Waverly agreed again. The older man sucked on his unlighted pipe. "I think, gentlemen, that we are dealing with *both* mistakes and a cover, but not in the usual sense. There is something here that does not meet the eye. Teenagers have been rioting, running wild at times, for many years. It is part of our modern world, it seems.

"But now we have a difference. Now we have what appears to be true madness, insanity. Some of it seems directed, some not. But in all cases ultimate violence has ensued, and the young people, and others, have died—smiling! It is as if something had pushed the young people beyond the normal limits. We know they were not drugged in the normal sense, and despite much work we have discovered no *agents provocateur*.

"We are looking for something capable of turning great masses of young people into mindless monsters who kill, steal, and perform planned atrocities apparently without direction! Something that works on great numbers, leaves no trace, and leads to single acts of definite method in some cases but not in all cases. That, gentlemen, is the key. Why does it work in only some cases? That is what we must know."

"Perhaps it is still experimental," Illya said. "That would explain why it doesn't work."

"That occurred to me," Waverly said. "And that is why we must move fast before it is perfected."

"How?" Solo said. "If there is no direction from outside, no agents, no visible contact with anyone, how can we trace it? You can't just go and question every member of a teenage mob?"

"Naturally not, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "In any case, that has been tried. The young people seem to know nothing, those who have survived. All they can tell us is that they suddenly felt the urge to be violent. In most cases, those who live have no true recollection of just how violent they have been."

"Like the alkaloid drugs," Illya said quickly. "Aware of what they are doing, but unaware of the speed, the degree."

"Exactly," Waverly said. "Over and over again authorities have reported that the teenagers appear to think they merely knocked down a person they have actually trampled to death."

"But they do know they have been violent?" Solo said.

"Yes, Mr. Solo, they know," Waverly said. The older man tapped his pipe on the circular table. "There is one more detail. It is, I believe, vital. Over the past six months the cases have tended to be prolonged. That is, the violence does not leave the young people as soon. Each time they appear to remain in their madness longer. We have no time to lose."

"But where do we start, sir?" Solo demanded.

"In Kandaville, I think," Waverly said. "You see, we now have one clue, our only clue."

The older man turned back to the screen and pressed a button. Instantly the scene of the airfield at Kandaville appeared. It was the same as before. Bodies of dead teenagers, the battered and bloody police and troops, the wrecked aircraft, and the dead president on his face.

But as Solo and Illya watched, the picture began to narrow its field, as though focusing on a single point.

"You will note the small group of police near the edge of the air field," Mr. Waverly said.

The picture on the screen became a close-up of this group. Four policemen, bloody and holding their heads—and standing with them, helping one policeman, a single man wearing the uniform of a native soldier.

Solo and Illya stared hard at the hazy face in the blow-up. Waverly placed two prints of the blow-up on the circular table and revolved the top until the pictures were in front of the two agents.

"That face, gentlemen, belongs to Azid Ben Rillah, a Somali of Muslim parentage. He was born, supposedly, in Somaliland, but he has spent little time there. He appeared in Kenya during the Mau-Mau troubles. He was seen in both Stanleyville with the Gizenga rebels, and in Leopoldville with the other side in the Congo affair.

"He has been identified in Zulu peace parades in South Africa, also as a native informer for the *Apartheid* Government in the same country. In actuality, he is an agent of THRUSH, uncovered only four months ago by Section-II men in Africa. There is absolutely no evidence of any action on his part that led to the mob that murdered the president down there. But he was there. You understand, gentlemen?"

"Is he still in Kandaville?" Solo said grimly.

"As far as Section-II there knows, he is," Waverly said. The Leader of U.N.C.L.E. stood up in a gesture of dismissal. "He is your man. I assume you will think of just what to do with him?"

"Any suggestions, sir?" Solo asked.

Waverly had returned to his desk. The older man seemed to

have already forgotten the presence of his agents. The job he had just given Solo and Kuryakin was only one of many he had to consider each day. After a moment, Waverly appeared to hear and look up again.

"Eh? Oh, I'm sure you'll think of everything—uh—Solo."

Illya was grinning like a cat as Solo turned away from Waverly. The two of them walked out through the door that silently opened and closed itself. They went to check on their transportation, and on the Section II agents in Africa.

FIVE

IDLEWILD AIRPORT, renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport, bustled with the night-departing passengers. Three giant jets were departing within the hour. Napoleon Solo, carrying a briefcase stepped to the loading desk to claim his seat on the London-bound B.O.A.C. jet.

Some buildings away, a small, bent old man with greying dark hair and a heavy beard shuffled up to the loading desk of the Air France flight non-stop to Paris. The uniformed loading clerk studied the old man closely but without giving himself away.

The old man muttered in French with a heavy German accent. The loading clerk stamped his ticket, gave him his seating card, and turned his attention to the next person.

At the B.O.A.C. loading desk the actions of a baggage handler were vastly different. Observing Napoleon Solo, the baggage handler suddenly bent over for a dropped suitcase. In the brief seconds he was bent down, the baggage handler muttered into the handle of the suitcase.

At the loading desk, Solo was passed through and took his place on a seat to await the time to board. Idly, he noticed the baggage handler pushing his cart away down the long, bright corridor.

Solo became aware of the noise before he actually heard it. A rumbling like the sea, turning into a roar that came closer. Solo leaped up, walked quickly toward the fence that imprisoned him inside the loading area.

He was too late.

The first of the horde of teenagers appeared running at the far end of the wide and shining corridor. Behind the first few young boys and girls he saw a solid wall of howling teenagers coming toward the loading area. Solo whirled and sprinted for the door to the plane. It was locked.

Quickly, he opened his briefcase and produced a small, circular object. He touched it to the electrically controlled door. He pressed a button. The door, activated by the special electronic circuit activator, sprung open. Solo dashed through,

just as the howling mob of teenagers reached the loading area and smashed down the fence.

In the loading ramp, a long tunnel with corrugated sides like some giant bellows, Solo ran toward the door into the jet. Already the howling teenagers were in the loading tunnel behind him.

Solo ran into the jet, past the protesting stewardess, and along the aisle toward the pilot's cabin. Behind him the teenagers knocked down the screaming stewardess.

Solo, inside the pilots' cabin, locked the door behind him. Again he opened his briefcase and produced a small, round pellet. Setting the pellet on the escape hatch, he pulled a tiny cord on the pellet and jumped back.

The door was bending, breaking under the pressure of the screaming mob behind him.

The pellet burst into white, flameless heat, a heat that would melt any metal known. The escape hatch dropped open. Solo threw his briefcase out, lowered himself through the open hatch, and let go.

He seemed to fall for minutes.

He hit hard on the concrete, rolled, and came up on his feet. Above him the mob of teenagers had reached the hatch. One was already jumping through.

The first teenager jumped down, tilted in the air, and landed on his side, screaming with the pain of a broken arm. Solo did not wait. Others were already jumping down. He picked up his briefcase and ran toward the distant corner of the loading building.

He reached the corner and turned it, the mob of teenagers strung out now behind him, some limping but still coming on. As he reached the next corner he stopped, skidded to a halt.

A second howling mob was coming at him from the other direction. He turned and ran out toward the great open area of the air field, running with the speed that had made him a track star in his young days.

As he ran into the dark night, he pulled the transmitter-receiver from his pocket. He raised the threadlike antennae.

"Bubba to Sonny. Bubba to Sonny. Condition Red, condition Red."

He pressed the receiving button.

"Sonny to Bubba. Instruct action. Am safely aboard."

Solo pressed his sending button, trying to speak clearly as he ran on across the dark field.

"Proceed. They are after me. I'll lead them off. Watch yourself."

"Can I help? Repeat, can I help?" the distant voice of Illya said from the tiny receiver.

Solo stopped and looked around. He could hear the howling mob still behind him, coming closer. He pressed his sending button.

"Proceed on mission. Good luck."

Solo replaced the tiny set in his pocket. He listened. The mob seemed to be moving off, heading the wrong way. He smiled and began to trot, carrying his briefcase. He heard the sound of motors too late.

Glaring light pinned him in the night like a moth on a pin.

He dropped his briefcase and drew his U.N.C.L.E. Special. He aimed the Luger-like pistol at the lights. They were car headlights, one set on either side of him. He flicked the special button on his pistol to set it to fire bullets not darts. He raised the pistol and aimed at the lights.

Something touched his neck. A faint, stinging prick.

He knew nothing more . . .

* * *

In his seat at the window of the Paris-bound jet, the old man with the beard muttered to himself. But it was neither French nor German he muttered. It was Russian—and his bright blue eyes were not old.

Illya replaced the tiny radio set in his pocket. He sat back in his seat. The disguise had worked for him. No one had chased the old man who spoke such bad French. His head turned and he seemed to sleep facing the window of the jet.

But Illya was not asleep. His eyes peered out into the night. He saw the faint lights of headlights far off in the center of the air field. He had a sinking sensation

as he looked at those strange lights and thought of Napoleon Solo. But there was work to do.

Soon, the jet took off. He had reported to headquarters the Condition Red call of Napoleon. There was nothing more he could do now but get on with his task.

As the field passed below, all was dark.

ACT II
THRUSH AND COUNTER-THRUSH

NAPOLEON SOLO did not open his eyes. Awake, alert again, with no ill effects beyond a blinding headache and a pain in his neck where the dart had struck, he remained motionless. He was surprised to be still alive.

His hands, he knew, were bound

behind him; his feet were encased in something soft yet strong. He probably did not have long to live, but the training of years never deserted him. He listened to the voices to remember them for future reference. Two men and a woman. He could not hear what they said, but he would never forget the timbre of their voices.

Cautiously, Solo opened his eyes. And saw nothing. He blinked, opened his eyes again—all was black, yet moving, fluttering with faint light.

As if his eyes were not open at all.

Yet he was opening them; he knew the muscles were opening his eyes.

But his eyes were not open.

"Look, his eyes are moving," the woman's voice said.

The voice of Maxine Trent.

"Fix the eyes," a man's deep voice said.

Something sprayed against his eyelids, a cool mist. He waited, blinked, and his eyes came open.

"Hello, Napoleon," Maxine said.

She stood before him, changed now. The soft female face was longer. harder. Her languid clothes of the afternoon had been changed for a severe black suit, a wide-brimmed hat pulled low. But she was smiling the same smile. She was still almost six feet tall, yet not too tall. Solo sighed. Even here and now she was a beautiful woman.

"Hello, Maxine," Solo said, mustering up a smile.

Behind Maxine all was black. He could not make out any shape to the room. There was a bright light on a fine inlaid table, but the light did not seem to reach any corners anywhere.

Solo could just make out the shapes of two men behind Maxine. He could not see them. While he was pretending to stare hard to make them out, he tested his bonds. The rope around his wrists behind the chair he was sitting in seemed secure. The soft material encasing his feet would not budge.

He glanced down to be sure of what he was up against, and he stared. Maxine Trent laughed mockingly. Solo stared at his feet. There was nothing holding them—nothing at all. They were encased in nothing, yet he felt some soft but strong material holding his feet.

There was nothing holding his feet, yet he could not move them. When he tried to move them, the unseen material clung and cut into his legs. Maxine laughed again.

"If you could turn, Napoleon, you would see that there is nothing holding your hands, either. No rope at all. See?"

Maxine held two mirrors in such a way that he could see his bound hands behind the chair. There was no rope. There was nothing hold-

ing his hands, yet they were bound tight.

"A toy, Mr. Solo," the deep male voice said from the darkness. "A simple hypnotic drug that paralyzes the muscles and induces the brain to ascribe some physical cause, such as ropes or a cement block on the feet. It is both effective as a restraining device, and as a demonstration of our limitless sources of power."

There was a sudden hiss from the dark, an eerie sound like wind whistling through a thin reed. Reedy, hissing and yet it was a voice. It was the weird, toneless voice of the other man hidden in the dark.

"We waste time. He will tell us," the hissing voice said.

Maxine Trent seemed to stiffen like a dog whose master has whistled. Her beautiful face changed, became a mask. A tremor very like fear seemed to shudder through her.

Solo stared toward the point in the dark where the reedy voice had hissed. It was a voice that was inhuman, made not of flesh and bone, but of metal and plastic, yet Solo knew now that this was the voice of a leader of THRUSH—a council member. It had to be to make Maxine jump like a dog in obedience and terror.

"Tell us what Waverly told you, Napoleon," Maxine Trent said. "It will save time."

"I like to see THRUSH work," Solo said calmly. "Sometimes I even learn something."

The deep male voice snapped in the dark. "The needle."

Solo laughed. "Pentathol? How unimaginative. I really expected better, especially with a council member present."

The reedy hiss of the hidden voice neither laughed nor threatened. "Council Member N, if that will help, Mr. Solo. And the needle does not contain pentathol. That would be far to slow and unreliable. No, I have developed something much better. Its effect is similar, but it acts instantly; no will can withstand it."

"Proceed, Agent Trent," the deep male voice ordered.

Maxine approached with the needle. Solo thought about the deep voice. This had to belong to a chief agent, above Maxine Trent, but below the horrible hissing voice. Somehow he had to see them.

"Try to relax, Napoleon," Maxine Trent said. "You will anyway. In five seconds you will tell us all you know."

The beautiful woman raised the needle, found a vein in his paralyzed arm, and plunged the point into his flesh.

TWO

ILLYA KURYAKIN leaned to look out the window of the small jet as it circled the city below. A white

city, dazzling in the African sun, the great river curving like a snake around the buildings. Even from the sky, Illya could see the great white government buildings in the center, and the grey-brown shacks surrounding them where the people still lived.

Illya stared down. It was for this that he had left the service of his own country—to bridge that terrible gap between the great white buildings and the miserable shacks of the people. To free the great river that wound below to serve the people, *all* the people.

He had seen the failure of a dream in his own country, the failure of many dreams in many places, and other places where there had not yet even been time to dream amid the misery.

And somewhere down there was a man, Azid Ben Rillah, who served a "nation" that wanted to destroy all dreams—all dreams but the dream of keeping every misery as it was. Down there, somewhere, THRUSH was at work to keep the hovels dirty, to forever separate the power from the people.

It was a "nation" Illya would destroy, and all like it. Then, perhaps, he could listen to his jazz records, read his books, travel as he had always wanted to, alone and afraid of no one and nothing, with no one afraid of him.

"Fasten your seat belts, please."

The voice of the stewardess pulled Illya from his reverie. He fastened his seat belt and waited. He had abandoned his disguise in Paris—even Napoleon might be made to talk—and now sat in the small jet as Specialist Tworkov of the Soviet trade mission to the new country. A drooping blond mustache hid his young face. He had acquired a creditable limp. Thick glasses hid his dark eyes. All his weapons were checked and in place.

Illya left the jet fourth in line. Behind the thick glasses his eyes watched. The field was clear. A fawning native porter ran up to clutch his suitcase. Illya casually fingered the deadly, needle-like knife in his side pocket. The native porter grinned up.

"*Bwana* have three more suitcase?"

"Can you carry three or six?" Illya said.

"Uphill three, downhill six," the native said.

"I have only one," Illya said.

"One is very good. I am twelve," the native said.

"I am nine," Illya said.

"So?" the native said. "Welcome to Africa, Mr. Kuryakin. Follow me closely."

Illya followed the porter across the field, his eyes, behind the thick lenses, scrutinizing everyone who neared them. The porter moved fast, did not pause on his way into the single main building of the airport. Once inside the building the porter led Illya to customs, and

through customs under the regular procedure.

Illya continued to follow the porter out to a taxi. Once inside the taxi, Illya watched the porter vanish. The taxi driver waited for Illya's instruction.

"Imperial Hotel," Illya said.

The driver nodded and drove off. Once out of the area of the airport, with no cars in sight on the sunny morning, the driver reached into his pocket and brought out an innocent card. It was plastic.

Illya opened a small bottle of fluid and placed a drop on the plastic. A faint purple spot appeared. Illya handed the card back to the driver. It had identified the driver as Joseph Ngara.

"You were supposed to have another man with you," Joseph Ngara said.

"We ran into trouble in New York."

"I'm sorry. Who was it?"

"Napoleon Solo," Illya said.

The taxi swerved a hair. "Napoleon? I've worked with him. Damn, Kuryakin, we can't afford to lose chief enforcement agents like him."

"We haven't lost him yet," Illya said. "You're Section-II out here?"

"Chief enforcement agent for Section-II, Africa. Our Section-I man briefed me," Joseph Ngara said. "We had our eye on Rillah for some time, but we only got the proof he was THRUSH a few months ago."

"Have you found what he is doing here?"

"Not precisely," Ngara said, "but he arrived less than a week before the riot that killed the president. We picked up one clue, a word: *PowerTen.* Two words, really, but our, ah, source says he heard it as one word: *PowerTen.*"

"Your source is reliable?" Illya asked.

"Reliable but low-placed. He heard Rillah use the word twice when talking otherwise in code on the telephone. The word seemed to impress Rillah."

"Anything else? Any weaknesses we can use to make him talk?" Illya asked.

"You know better, Illya," Ngara said. "THRUSH agents don't have weaknesses."

"Everyone has a weakness somewhere, Ngara," Illya said. "Only THRUSH knows how to neutralize the weaknesses of their agents. Is there anything unusual about Rillah?"

"Yes, he likes modern jazz music. He frequents a place called The Yellow Zebra. Almost every night he's there."

"Jazz?" Illya said.

"It's more this rock and roll, the long-haired kids with guitars," Ngara said.

Teenage music! Illya's dark eyes narrowed. He sat back in the taxi.

"I think we had better visit The Yellow Zebra tonight," Illya said.

Ngara nodded. By this time they

had reached The Imperial Hotel, Illya paid Ngara, as he would any driver, and went in to claim the room reserved for Comrade Tworkov. All was in order: the Russian trade mission was, conveniently, out of the city at this time. Section-V did not make mistakes when they arranged a cover. Illya examined the room, secured it against surprise attack, and slept soundly until time to go that night.

The Yellow Zebra was a loud neon glare in the night of Kandaville. It was a small club, down a flight of stairs from the street. A quartet of young men played and sang in strong rhythm on the bandstand. They played well, and Illya nodded his appreciation as he entered with Ngar. The young girls of the city whirled across the dance floor, their young bodies quick and alive.

"There," Ngara said.

Illya looked. Azid Ben Rillah sat alone at a table near the bandstand. The Somali lounged indolently, a long Russian-made cigarette dangling slack from his full lips, a glass of some colorless liquid in front of him. His strong, dark hands fondled the glass like a lover, raised it to his lips from time to time.

Illya slipped into a seat at a table behind Rillah. Joseph Ngara sat with him. Illya had removed his disguise now. The Russian Tworkov was supposedly asleep in the Imperial Hotel.

The blond U.N.C.L.E. agent looked like nothing more than a young music lover on the town, but his sharp eyes missed nothing. He noted the faint sign given by Ngara to a young waiter, and to a lithe girl singer who came out now on the bandstand and smiled softly at Azid Ben Rillah.

"Rillah seems a little interested," Ngara said without looking at Illya. "But I'm worried. He's smart, and Mahyana is one of our newer agents. I'm afraid she'll overplay it. But someone has to get closer to him."

"There may not be time," Illya said. "Whatever they have, it seems to be being advanced rapidly. Perhaps a day, two days, but then we'll have to force his hand. We—"

Azid Ben Rillah suddenly turned around in his seat and his deep-set brown eyes passed across Illya's face. To anyone but an agent as sharply trained as Kuryakin it would have appeared that Rillah barely noticed him, for the brown eyes immediately shifted away to look at another part of the room.

But Illya knew better. Azid Ben Rillah had been shocked within a hair of his life when he had seen Illya. There had been no more than a flicker in the brown eyes of the Somali, a faint stiffening of Rillah's body, a minute knotting of the corded muscles of the THRUSH agent's neck. But it had been enough to betray him.

Azid Ben Rillah had recognized Illya—and had been startled.

Which meant, at least, that Napoleon Solo had not talked yet. A man who had known Illya was coming would not have been shocked at the sight of him.

No, the Somali had been stunned, paralyzed for a fleeting second, by something else.

Illya felt a sudden coldness in his stomach.

What was it?

Something he, Illya, saw in the dark face of Azid Ben Rillah. What? Damn it, Kuryakin, he told himself silently, what was it?

He stared at the dark face of the Somali. Rillah, recovering instantly as befitted a trained agent of THRUSH, was casually continuing his contemplation of the lithe and soft young dancers. Illya abandoned all attempts at concealment. He stared at the dark, indolent face.

Yes! It was the face. Something —something he had not seen in the fuzzy blowup in New York. A picture can only tell so much, and the picture in New York had not been a good one. Now, with the live face before his staring eyes, Illya saw something different, something—familiar!

Yes, familiar! He *knew* that face. Not as it was, not dark like this, and the eyes—Illya stared, forced his mind back and back. How far? How far back was it?

Rillah, he knew, had had a similar feeling, the Somali knew Illya from somewhere. But where, when? The eyes—blue! The eyes should have been blue! But no Somali had blue eyes. The face floating somewhere in the dim past of Illya's mind had blue eyes and a fair skin, not a Somali at all.

It was something no picture could show, but the aspect of that face, the real live face, was known to Illya. Far back. Before U.N.C.L.E. Yes, long before U.N.C.L.E. when he had served in the Soviet—

And he had it!

He knew who Azid Ben Rillah really was.

In that instant the Somali who was not a Somali suddenly stood and walked quickly for a curtained doorway at the side of the room.

Illya leaped in pursuit.

Joseph Ngara was right behind him. Ngara nodded sharply to the waiter, who was one of his men, and to the girl singer. The waiter dropped his tray and clawed under his coat.

The girl singer lifted her skirt showing long, beautiful legs like smooth brown marble—and show-

ing a tiny holster from which she drew her small pistol.

The three African Section-II members converged on the curtained doorway. Illya had been quick but Azid Ben Rillah had been even quicker. The fake Somali vanished through the doorway.

Illya followed, through a passageway and out, suddenly, into the dark African night of an alley that stank of garbage.

Rillah was waiting.

The fusillade of shots from the semi-automatic pistol hammered the night, striking chips from the stone wall, bare inches from Illya's head.

Illya went down, his U.N.C.L.E. Special out. He clicked the control to the paralyzing-dart magazine. He needed Rillah alive —false brown colored contact lenses, and all.

Rillah stepped out, firing madly.

Illya raised his pistol from where he lay and fired once, twice. The sharp spit of the pistol firing darts was barely heard in the night.

Azid Ben Rillah clawed at his neck and went down, rigid on the filthy stones of the alley.

Illya started to rise.

They came from both sides at once.

Joseph Ngara and his two agents came out the door, guns ready.

The six strangers came from the open end of the alley. Their guns were held out in front of them. They stood crouched, legs straddled wide, firing as they came.

Joseph Ngara went down, riddled and dead.

The waiter choked on his own blood in his torn throat.

The girl singer sprawled in the shelter of two heavy garbage cans. She crouched, her dress torn open, legs and breast brown in the dim light—and she never stopped firing.

Her small pistol empty, she grabbed and reached Ngara's U.N.C.L.E. Special, set it on automatic, fired a withering fire toward the killers coming fast down the alley.

Illya clicked his Special to bullets and poured fire into the six strangers.

Six who were only three now, the others dead or dying.

No one had spoken a word. They were all trained, and words did not help. Cries of pain or anger only wasted time, spoiled the deadly aim.

Illya smiled like a wolf in battle. Three to two, but he and the girl had cover, the three THRUSH men did not.

Azid Ben Rillah lay silent between the two battling sides.

Illya aimed carefully this time. It would soon be over.

And the three remaining THRUSH agents suddenly vanished in great sheets of flame. Flame licked high in the alley. Flame that rushed across the

ground toward the girl and Illya as if pushed on a strong wind.

But there was no wind.

Illya felt cold.

They had thrown flamebombs, deadly flames that fed on their own creeping fuel and moved toward Illya to consume him.

THREE

NAPOLEON SOLO talked, his voice filling the dark, cornerless room where Maxine Trent stood above him and the two hidden men stood behind in the shadows. Maxine still held the needle. An instant in his arm, and Solo began to talk at once.

"Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went. The lamb was sure to go."

"Tell us!" Maxine Trent cried. "What did Waverly tell you?"

"Baa, Baa, Black sheep, have you any wool?" Solo said, his voice crisp and precise. "Yes sir, yes sir, Three bags full!"

The reedy, inhuman voice hissed from the dark. "Slap him, you fool. He has to tell us. The serum cannot be evaded. He has to tell us what he knows!"

Maxine Trent slapped Solo hard. Blood trickled lightly from the corner of his mouth.

"The nineteen forty-two St. Louis Cardinals were one of the great teams of all time. Ray Sanders played first base, Marty Marion was at shortstop, Stan Musical was in right field, Enos Slaughter—"

Now the deep voice cursed from the dark room. Maxine Trent stared at Solo, turned to look helplessly, with fear in her eyes, toward the hidden men. The deep voiced man spoke.

"It is no use; he has been conditioned. He can tell us nothing this way."

"Conditioned?" the thin, hissing voice said.

"U.N.C.L.E. has its methods, too," the deep-voiced man said. "Conditioning so that under any form of truth serum a man will only tell what he has been conditioned to tell. It is a long process, much too long for general use. I knew they had conditioned the five Section-I members to give us false data; we had Waverly once and everything he told us was false. But I did not know they had extended it down to Section-II. You will get nothing but nonsense from Solo this way."

There was a silence. Maxine Trent stared down at the babbling Solo as he reeled off the personnel and exploits of the 1942 St. Louis Cardinal baseball team. The needle in her hand seemed ludicrous now. She wanted to stop Solo, shut him up, turn off the endless stream of ridiculous information.

She slapped him, but he neither blinked nor stopped, rendered helpless by the truth drug.

"Stop him," the reedy voice hissed.

A hand holding another needle appeared from the dark. Maxine Trent took it and again plunged it into Solo's arm. Solo stopped babbling at once. His eyes came unglazed. He blinked, grinned up at Maxine Trent.

"I trust you enjoyed all my information, Maxine," Solo said.

The deep voice cursed again in the dark behind Maxine Trent.

"Prepare him. We will have to use older methods," the deep voice said.

"Anything," the hissing voice cried from the dark. "I must know what Waverly knows! The smallest error must be corrected! You understand?"

"Yes," Maxine Trent said. She looked down at Solo. "I'm sorry, Napoleon, but you won't cooperate. You can't be conditioned against simple torture."

"Try me," Solo said.

The deep voice whispered somewhere off in the darkness. Then a hand appeared again from the dark. It held another hypodermic needle.

"Release him from the hypnotic drug, make him comfortable," the deep voice said.

Maxine did as she was instructed. Almost at once Solo felt that the ropes were gone, the soft material holding his feet was taken away. He moved, stretching the cramps from his muscles. A hand came out of the dark, holding a glass with amber fluid in it.

"Give him a drink," the deep voice said. "The best Scotch whiskey, Mr. Solo."

Solo drank and the warmth coursed through his body.

"Perhaps a sandwich, some hot coffee?" the deep voice said.

Solo nodded, and his mind came alive. Inside there was a sudden flicker, a plan. He was aware of what the deep-voiced chief agent of THRUSH was doing—the hot and cold treatment. A variant. In torture it is the sudden changes that break a man. The coming and going and coming again of pain.

They were awakening his nerves, his responses. Almost any man can face danger once; it is the second time, the third time that are hard. Likewise in torture. Once the pain began a man could slowly learn to stand it, to self-condition his body to take the increasing degrees of pain.

It was the swing from pain to peace, to pain again that was hard. First agony, then relief, then agony, and again relief, until what finally broke a man was the fear of the next agony.

They knew this and they were relaxing his defenses. How far would they go? A faint hope flickered. A double hope, and a plan. He had his cigarette lighter camera in his pocket; he could feel it. And he still had the small but powerful gas bomb that was his

innocent-seeming pearl stickpin. He did not think that the deep-voiced man, or the hissing-voiced Council Member N, would apply the torture.

Another aspect of good torture was to leave the victim alone with some mindless torturer, someone who could not be talked to. The true interrogator went away, and the victim in his agony almost

prayed for the return of one who would listen. It was a chance. Solo nodded, breathed.

"First, if I could, a cigarette?" Solo said quietly.

"Of course," the deep-voiced man said from the dark. "Maxine, give him a cigarette."

Maxine handed Solo a cigarette. He reached quickly into his pocket for his lighter. He flicked it once, twice, three times before the flame burst out and he lighted his cigarett. The reedy voice hissed.

"The lighter, you fools! It is a camera!"

Maxine grabbed at the lighter. But Solo had anticipated her. The instant he had taken his three pictures of the dark ahead of him through the infra-red lense, he had pressed the tiny button that dropped the miniature film cartridge out into his hand.

As Maxine grabbed the camera, he palmed the tiny cartridge and let it vanish up his sleeve.

"Open it!" the reedy voice hissed.

Maxine opened it and removed the film cartridge she found there. Solo tried to look beaten. They did not know that the camera had a special optical arrangement that took pictures on both cartridges through a single lense. The camera was made for just such an eventuality. There would be a cartridge in the camera—and it would be exposed in case they checked to be sure.

The deep-voiced man checked.

"Not bad shots, Mr. Solo. I admire you. Infra-red. I never underestimate U.N.C.L.E. Too bad you underestimate us."

"Why bother?" Maxine Trent said. "He won't leave here alive."

The hiss of the inhuman voice was almost like a laugh this time as it burst low and horrible from the darkness.

"You see too many spy movies, Agent Trent. No, we will not tell him what he wants to know because he will die. This is not a movie. Prepare him now; we can waste no more time. We will send in Gotz."

The deep-voiced man laughed. "We will leave you now, Mr. Solo. Miss Trent and Gotz will take

good care of you. If you find you would like to talk, just send for us. We will not be far."

Suppressing the smile he felt at their predictable actions, Solo flexed his arms as if preparing his body to resist the tortures of the unknown Gotz. One of the weaknesses of power was the tendency to always use the same methods. to enforce its strength.

Solo had often seen this peculiarity of power-mad nations. It had been one of the main weaknesses of Hitler's Germany, and it was a common, fundamental weakness of THRUSH.

But it was time to act. Solo did not know how many men there would be with the unknown Gotz.

Maxine stood watching him, her pistol in her hand, now that he was free. She was the proper distance away, and the rest of the room was still lost in darkness. Solo would need time to find a door, an exit. He stretched.

"Careful, Napoleon," Maxine said. "I would hate to shoot you now. Too bad you have to be U.N.C.L.E. They'll never let me keep you."

"I'm sorry really, Maxine," Solo said, continuing to flex his arms and legs, but carefully.

"You'd make a lovely pet. I could tranquillize you every day," the tall, beautiful agent purred. "My little kitten. But you have to be U.N.C.L.E. Why couldn't you have been just C.I.A., or British MI-five?"' They'd let me play with you then."

"I'll try to do better next time," Solo said.

"Poor Napoleon. Always trying," Maxine said. "It wasn't nice of you to trap me earlier, was it? How did you guess? The record-player, I imagine. I told 'N' that you would guess when it shut off and the tape-recorder came on."

"It was a trifle too convenient, Maxine," Solo said. And he distracted her for an instant. "So 'N' isn't that smart?"

"Not as smart as he thinks," Maxine said smugly, her guard down the fraction of a second as a result of her anger at her leader. "They all think they can't make errors on the Council. They—."

Solo moved. His hand flicked up and across his tie, tore the pearl stick-pin out, and hurled it at Maxine's feet, all in a single motion.

The force of pulling it out set off the fuse. A cloud of gas exploded and engulfed Maxine Trent. Still the beautiful agent managed to fire a single shot. The bullet tore a furrow, skin deep in the side of Napoleon Solo's head. He went down, but came back up almost at once. His head ached, but there was not much time, not after the shot.

Maxine Trent lay crumpled on the floor of the room. She would be unconscious for hours. Solo stepped quickly through the light

into the dark corners. He found, once his eyes were accustomed to the dark, that the room was large and empty. Only the inlaid table and the lamp were in the completely silent room.

And there were no doors.

Solo blinked, looked.

There were nothing but smooth walls without doors or windows. He walked quickly around the entire perimeter of the room. There was no way out. And then he saw that the room was also soundproof. This, at least, gave him a little time to locate some exit. There had to be a way. But he could not find it. Nothing but bare smooth walls.

Routine—and a little luck—came to his aid. Solo had been an agent a long time, he knew that no one survived long without a little luck, accident, pure chance, all helped by the mistakes of the enemy. THRUSH had a prescribed routine of operation, and it helped Solo now.

A tiny red light winked on, winked three times and stopped. But it had been enough. It had to be a signal that someone was about to enter the room. A precaution, of course, since all agents who used this room undoubtedly had standing orders to shoot anyone who entered without the signal. A precaution that would save him.

Solo waited.

The wall opened silently, without even a hiss, directly beneath the winking red light. A man stepped through. Two men.

The second man was a tall, slender Chinese carrying a machine pistol. Solo chopped him down with a single blow to the neck under the ear.

The first man turned slowly.

He was the biggest man Solo had ever seen. A giant, over seven feet tall, weighing over three hundred-fifty pounds without an ounce of fat anywhere. There was no doubt that this was Gotz, the torturer.

Gotz turned ponderously, his tiny pig eyes seeing the Chinese lying on the ground, Maxine lying unconscious. He moved toward Solo.

There was not an instant to wait. Once in those giant hands Solo would have no hope. The giant could not be fought. One chance was all Solo would have, and he took it.

His feet braced against the wall, Solo pushed off as hard as he could and hurled himself out and up toward the giant. His open hand thrust straight up and forward. The heel of his hand caught the giant flush on the point of the chin, snapping the giant's neck back with enough force to break a roof beam.

Surprised, ponderous, the giant could not evade the single blow. His head snapped back on his bull neck. He staggered, grunted once with pain, and collapsed in a quiv-

ering mass of bone and muscle. It was a blow that would have instantly killed almost any man on earth, but Solo did not think the giant was dead.

He turned and dashed through the opening without waiting a second. He ran down a narrow steel corridor. At the far end there was a door. At the door Solo stopped, took off his shoe, removed the heel, and took out the thin strip of thermite foil. He stuck the foil to the lock area, pulled the magnesium fuse and jumped back.

A large hole melted in the door. Solo pushed and the door opened. Alarms went off, loud, clanging. But he was in a bright hallway. There was light. He reached a win-

dow. Outside he saw the city and below him the river. He was still in New York, in some riverfront warehouse building.

The alarm clanged on; feet pounded.

The river was three stories below. The window was locked and could not be opened. Solo backed off, wrapped his suit coat around his head, and dived through the glass. He fell, jacknifed in the air, and hit the water in a clean dive.

Under water he let his coat go, and swam for the dark shadow. He came up beneath the building. The film cartridge was still safe inside his shirt. A tug passed close on the river. He swam for it.

FOUR

IN THE KANDAVILLE alley, Illya Kuryakin watched the flames flow toward him. The girl singer was still firing.

"Back!" Illya shouted. "Get Rillah!"

The flames that roared around them, slowly engulfing the alley, had one advantage. They hid them from the THRUSH agents. Crouched low, Illya and the girl, Mahyana, dragged the paralyzed Rillah back away from the flames.

The flames blocked them from the door into the Yellow Zebra. The other wall had no openings of any kind. The wall of the club had a window, but it was high up, too high. Illya and the girl looked around. There was no way out. The flames flowed inexorably closer. Illya looked at the pretty, dark girl.

"There is only one way," he said. "We will have to go out through the fire."

"They're waiting," Mahyana said.

"There is no other way," Illya cried, raising his voice now as the flames licked at the buildings, crackling in the night.

"All right," Mahyana said. "I'm ready. But we will have to leave Rillah. We—"

The sound came from above. Illya whirled, his Special aimed, ready. But he did not fire. Above them the window had opened high up. A face leaned out. A face with a black beard.

"Here, Dad—grab on!"

It was the bearded man calling down from the window. A rope came out, dropped. Illya looked at the flames. He pushed Mahyana and she climbed up the dangling rope like a panther up a tree. Bending, Illya quickly tied the rope beneath the inert arms of Azid Ben Rillah. Then he swarmed up the rope himself.

Inside the window he hauled the unconscious Rillah up and into the room, where they all stood. Flames licked at the walls of the room. Fire-engine sirens were wailing closer.

"You could of got singed, man," the bearded man said.

"Yes, we could have been burned a little," Illya said.

The bearded man looked out the window once more.

"Say, that's some fire. I mean, how come it burns so good on stone like that, Dad?"

"It would take too long to explain," Illya said, "but we thank you. Now I suggest we leave. The fire seems to be burning the building."

"I hear you, Dad. We abandon the scene," the bearded man said.

Illya and the bearded man carried the inert form of Rillah out and down a flight of dark back stairs. Mahyana led the way, the U.N.C.L.E. Special she had taken from the dead Ngara ready in her hand.

"A cool chick, man," the bearded man said.

Illya studied his new helper. A boy, really, not a man. But a boy who had had the right strength at the right time.

The bearded kid saw Illya watching him.

"I play banjo, man," the bearded boy said. "Joe Hoker."

"Fighting Joe?" Illya said.

"You beat me, dad? Just Joe Hooker from Hoboken. I play banjo with The Beavers, take a chorus sometimes. We come out here for the loot. Out here it's still beards. The long hair ain't made it yet."

"Well, Mr. Joe Hooker, I thank you."

"Say no more, man," the bearded boy said.

They carried Rillah to the cellar of the club, and out a side entrance Mahyana knew.

The dark girl surveyed the street carefully.

"Come," she waved with her pistol.

They carried Rillah to her waiting car. Joe Hooker went back to his banjo. Illya drove fast away from The Yellow Zebra toward a safe room where Mahyana directed him.

* * *

Napoleon Solo, a bandage on his head, and wearing a fresh suit, watched Alexander Waverly study the photographs he had taken in the THRUSH room.

"They will have abandoned that place by now, of course," Waverly remarked. "You say the voice sounded mechanical?"

"Like wind through metal and plastic," Solo said.

"Yes," Waverly said as if thinking about it. "You have given our chemical people all you can about the drugs they used on you? Well, what do you make of the pictures?"

Solo looked at his copies of the blowups. "The one you can see I recognize. He was the baggage handler at Idlewild. Hardly a council member."

"No, I think not. A chief agent though, and we know him. Good work that," Waverly said. "Which voice do you think he was?"

"The deep voice. He had to be, sir," Solo said.

Waverly nodded, looked for his pipe. "Unfortunate that the other is turned away. We can hardly see his face at all in any picture. Still, we know he is small, rather thin, and has an odd voice. From what you say he may also be a chemist himself. Council members are often scientists in their own right, you know."

Solo studied the pictures. "Research says that from the cut and cloth of his suit he could be British, or from any of the Commonwealth nations."

Waverly found his pipe. "A rather large Commonwealth, I should say."

"What puzzles me," Solo said, "is that voice. I'm sure it was his real voice, and how could he hide it? Why don't we have anything on that voice in our files? It stands to reason he's an important man—all THRUSH Council members are. We should have the voice on file."

Waverly searched for his tobacco. "They ran it through. The result was negative. Possibly the man never speaks in public. Have you seen my tobacco?"

"It's in the second drawer. You put it there," Solo said.

Waverly opened the second drawer. "Ah yes, thank you. I suggest we wait for a report from Mr. —uh—Kuryakin. It seems he has a good prospect in Kandaville."

Azid Ben Rillah came awake in the hidden room of U.N.C.L.E.'s Section-II in Kandaville.

Illya sat in a straight chair, the chair turned so that he could rest his chin on the back, and watched the Somali come awake. The room was as secure as human brains could make it. It was high, with a wide view of the great river that skirted the city.

Azid Ben Rillah touched his face and looked at Illya. The small, blond U.N.C.L.E. agent smiled.

"It won't come off, the skin coloring," Illya said. "But I removed the contact lenses. Your eyes are blue again."

Rillah nodded. "I thought you spotted me." The fake Somali lapsed into his native language—Russian. "How have you been, Illya?"

"Quite well, thank you, Alexy. Interesting that you kept the initials," Illya said, also in his native tongue. "Alexy Borayavitch Razov, and Azid Ben Rillah. You were reported dead."

"Our homeland dislikes defectors," Alexy Razov said. "I felt safer to vanish after I turned my coat, shall we say. And you? Since you were looking for me, I gather you still work for our old friends in the secret police? Am I to expect a quick and secret trip home. After ten years, it will be strange. All that snow. Hard on a poor Somali."

"No, Alexy, home is not where you are going. Exactly where you go will be up to you."

Razov sat up on the bed. He looked down at the chains on his hands and feet. Then the dark-skinned man with the strange blue eyes looked at Illya.

"How is it up to me?"

"If you like, you can be safely in New York tomorrow. In London. Anywhere you choose. And with a new face, a new identity.

"New face? You can do that?"

The turncoat Russian was studying Illya very carefully. Razov seemed to be suddenly afraid, very afraid.

"You could protect me? Hide me?" Razov said.

"Yes," Illya said.

The ex-Soviet agent was trembling. "In exchange for what?"

"For the meaning of *PowerTen*. For where it is being made, and what exactly it does."

Razov seemed to collapse on the bed. The dark-skinned, blue-eyed turncoat lay on the bed shivering, his lips trembling. Razov's whole body shook as if in the grip of some terrrible fever. His Russian was broken, shaking.

"You know! You know what I am. Then—" Razov turned his face to stare at Illya, "then—you must be with—U.N.C.L.E.! Yes, I see it now, U.N.C.L.E.! I wondered about that girl, the singer. Damn you to hell, you're with U.N.C.L.E. and I'm done, finished!"

"We can hide you from THRUSH," Illya said.

"Oh damn you! Why? Why?" Razov cried. "We were friends!"

"It seems that we took different paths, Alexy," Illya said. "Very different paths."

Razov sat up, his fear gone for a moment, "U.N.C.L.E.! A pack of milk-sops, do-gooders, bleeding hearts! What counts in this world but power, money, victory? THRUSH will be everything soon! Everything!"

"No," Illya said. "THRUSH will be nothing. They are nothing now, and they will always be nothing but an evil force doomed to failure."

Razov turned white under his dark tint. "Failure! You know who I am. I'm dead. I'm through. They will kill me now!"

"We can protect you, Alexy!" Illya said.

Alexy laughed. A hollow, hopeless laugh. A laugh of the dead and the damned.

"No one can protect me, Illya," the turncoat Russian said. "I can't even make a deal. They will kill me now."

"Don't be an utter fool! They can't reach you here," Illya said testily.

Razov began to laugh.

"They can't get to you. They can't even know what room you're in!" Illya cried.

Razov laughed harder, a wild, hysterical laugh made up partly of fear, partly of sardonic amusement.

"They don't have to reach me, you fool. They don't have to know what room you have me in. They only have to know what building it is and they know that. Look!"

The former Russian agent pointed a long finger toward the window of the room. Illya whirled. At first he saw nothing. Only a window nine stories above the street. Then he saw it.

Outside the window, over a hundred yards away, he saw a kite flying. A large, flying toy. But it was no toy. Illya took his binoculars and went to the window. The kite was not a kite. It was a type of balloon; it had a small motor that could maneuver it. And its long, stiff string that was not string but thin cable went down to where two men stood on the roof of a building. The men wore earphones.

"That microphone can pick up within six hundred feet," Razov said. "They hear all I say."

"But they still can't reach you, and we'll soon stop their evesdropping," Illya said calmly.

He took out his U.N.C.L.E. Special, fitted the tubular metal stock, the telescopic sight, and placed the weapon against his shoulder. He fired twice. One shot cut the thin cable. The second shot punctured the balloon device and the kite fell. On the roof below the two men vanished.

"Now they can't hear you or get to you," Illya said. "Now you can tell me what *PowerTen* is."

"You fool," Razov said.

And laughed.

It was the last sound Alexy Borayavitch Razov, alias Azid Ben Rillah, ever made.

There was a small explosion, a puff of white smoke from Razov's chest, and the laugh died in a strangled scream. Razov fell over backwards and lay with his dead eyes staring up at nothing.

* * *

Later, in New York, Waverly and Napoleon Solo listened to the report of Illya Kuryakin by overseas relay on the miniature radio set.

"It was sewn under his skin. It must have been there for years. A very powerful explosive pellet, too thin to be seen. There was only the

smallest scar, and no metal to be detected."

Illya's voice, from distant Kandaville, continued, "I would imagine all THRUSH agents must have such a device inserted in their bodies. When they are caught, it is detonated remotely to silence them —in most cases probably at once. This time they tried their listening device first. They know we are on to *PowerTen.*"

Waverly was solemn. "Very well, Mr. Kuryakin. It can't be helped. Did you find any leads at all?"

"One," the far-off voice of the small Russian said. "It was in his shoe, under the inner sole. A ticket, I think, admitting two to a performance of The Bedlam Trio in a Sydney night club."

Solo leaned across the table in the New York office. "Sydney? Our unknown council member N could have come from Australia, sir."

"So I recall," Waverly said drily. "Yes, I think Australia would be a likely place to look next. Do you hear me, Mr. Kuryakin?"

There was a chuckle from distant Africa.

"Then I will meet Napoleon in Bedlam."

Waverly winced noticeably. "Please keep your humor in some kind of check, Mr. Kuryakin. But, yes, by all means join Mr. Solo in Bedlam at once."

Before Illya had apologized for his bad joke, Napoleon Solo was on his way out the door to pick up his tickets for Sydney, Australia.

ACT THREE
TRIO OF BEDLAM

THE HARBOR of Sydney is spanned by a giant semi-circular arched bridge that towers above the water. It is the first thing you see as you fly in. Then came Customs. The third would be, for most weary travellers, one of the Australian city's modern hotels, or perhaps the great beaches later for a swim.

For Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin, after Customs there was only a clandestine meeting, a joining of forces.

After that came the howling teenagers.

Four hundred howling, screaming young people, dancing a frenzy to the music of five quartets of long-haired, bearded young men under high hanging cages, where slim-legged and full-breasted young girls danced behind the hanging bars.

The Bedlam.

The muscular man on the door, far beyond his teens, checked their ticket.

"Sorry, mate, tickets only. That it? Right, go on in."

The big man beamed at them and turned his attention to the next group trying to enter the madhouse of music and stamping young feet. For his sortie into Bedlam Solo had

changed his usually impeccable clothes for a shoddy sweater and tight jeans.

Illya did not have to change; his tight black trousers and usual black shirt, coupled with his blond haystack hair, made him seem part of it all.

Behind them, with a carefully procured ticket, was the dark, slim Mahyana.

Illya had brought the Africa Section-II agent with him—what better agent for The Bedlam than a girl singer?

Inside the door, deafened by the howling mob of dancers and screamers, they appeared to meet, Illya and Mahyana. Two young people with mutual interests, ready for life.

Solo led them through the rocking room toward the first bandstand. Four young men with long hair gyrated, handling their electronic instruments perfectly. Above them in the cages the girls moved sinuously, their eyes closed, their young bodies moving in perfect rhythm with the beat of the music.

"Four," Solo said. "Hardly a trio."

Illya pointed out, "The sign on the stand says they are The Waif Wailers."

"I hope that whatever *PowerTen* is, they don't feed it to all of them here and send them after us," Solo whispered.

"You have the most charming thoughts," Illya said.

"Just what are we looking for?" Mahyana wanted to know.

"If we knew that, my dear, we wouldn't have to look," Solo said.

The beautiful brown-skinned girl smiled at Solo. Illya sighed. He hoped that both Napoleon and Mahyana would remember that there was work to do, dangerous work. Illya grinned wryly. Perhaps he was just jealous. And perhaps he had a right to be. After all, he had seen the girl first. She had almost saved his life.

Solo whispered to Mahyana, "I think our Illya would prefer it if we tended to business."

"It is hard to look into each other's eyes, and still look for trouble," Illya said.

They had reached the next bandstand now. Five young men with beards sang and stamped, banged hard on their instruments. The sign on the bandstand read: The Beavers. The banjo man suddenly bent down.

"Daddy, you following me?"

Solo studied the bearded young man who grinned down at them

from the bandstand. "Is this a friend of yours, Illya?"

"I would like you to meet Fighting Joe Hooker from Hoboken," Illya said.

"You puttin' me on, Dad?" Hooker said.

Mahyana smiled at the bearded boy. "Fighting Joe Hooker was an American Civil War general, Mr. Hooker. I think Mr. Kuryakin means it as a compliment."

"I knew I should have finished kindergarten," Joe Hooker said, and smiled at the pretty singer. "You brought the cool chick, Dad. That makes my night. Put away your weapons and sing a chorus, doll."

"All right," Mahyana said.

The girl climbed onto the bandstand with her fluid motion, the slim brown body hiding the muscle of an athlete. Illya and Solo circulated slowly, watching the room. Joe Hooker strummed his banjo, beating time, grinning at the girl as she sang. Illya nodded toward the other bandstands across the milling mob of teenage dancers.

"I see no trios, Napoleon. Perhaps they are not here tonight?"

"Then why did the doorman act as if they were?" Solo said without looking at Illya, his body keeping time as if the music were his only interest.

"I don't know. Perhaps Mr. Hooker will tell us," Illya said.

Solo nodded, snapping his fingers, his eyes studying the room. Everything seemed normal: the youngsters were dancing a storm, a bright happiness on all their faces. With the exception of the doorman outside and some of the musicians, it did not look as though there was a person in the room over twenty years old.

"Nice, real nice," Joe Hooker said as Mahyana finished her chorus and The Beavers took a breather. The bearded banjo man squatted down on the platform. "This moving is too much, Dad. Yesterday Kandaville, today Down Under, crazy."

"Mr. Hooker," Illya said.

"Joe, Dad, just Joe. *Mister* is for TV stars over fifty."

"All right, Joe," Solo said. "What can you tell us about The Bedlam Trio?"

"Local group. This is home base," Hooker said. "Only—"

"Do they travel a great deal?" Illya broke in.

"No, man, they sit, you know? I mean, this is their pad. Only thing is, they—"

"Is their anything peculiar about them? Anything unusual," Solo said.

"They're on, Dad, if that's what you mean."

"On?" Illya said.

"Turned on, man—the pot, you know?"

"Marijuana?" Solo said.

"They smoke up a storm, and that's kind of funny, you know? I mean, the new rock and roll boys

don't usually make that scene. They're the only group I know, way out. Only, Dads, maybe you've got another sort of group in mind."

"Why?" Solo snapped.

"Well, The Bedlam gang here ain't a trio. They're a quartet. See, over there."

Illya, Solo and Mahyana turned quickly to look at the four muscular young men on the last bandstand across the dancing room. There were four—and they were nearest the exit. They were also very strange looking. They wore black leather jackets, bulky jackets that could hide almost anything. But it was their eyes.

Solo whispered. "Look at their eyes!"

"The same as in the pictures—maniacal," Illya said.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Solo whispered, his mouth still smiling as if he was talking about nothing more important than the music.

"I am," Illya said. "A trap. That ticket was left for me to find. It must be a standard booby trap, intended to bring anyone who captures or kills one of their men straight here."

"I agree. And I think we are going to have trouble getting out," Solo said.

"I would say a diversion is indicated," Illya said.

"But we should talk to them, The Bedlams," Solo said

"Later would seem wiser," Illya said.

"I agree," Solo said.

The two agents spoke low and casually to Mahyana. The girl nodded her understanding. Joe Hooker squatted down again on the bandstand above them.

"If you're interested, Dads, the Bedlam boys look mighty interested in you."

The bearded banjo man nodded toward the far bandstand. The four muscular young men in the black leather jackets had put down their instruments and were looking toward Illya and Solo. Illya pointed to the doorman standing with them. Solo nodded.

"All right, now. Listen," Solo said. "We'll head for the door together. If they start to cut us off, I'll drop a smoke bomb; that should shake this place up. When I do, make a run for the door. I'll cover the rear."

"Now!" Illya said.

The three agents started for the door. From the bandstand, the four leather-jacketed youths began to move to cut them off. Illya and Solo pushed the girl ahead of them. It looked for a moment that they would make it.

Then it happened.

From out of the hordes of dancing teenagers, single young men and girls began to appear—all wearing black leather jackets. The boys wore jackets and blue jeans, the girls the same jackets and tight

stretch pants. They seemed to appear all through the room—and all their eyes had a steady, fixed, maniacal glaze. Eyes that were almost insane, yet happy, exhilarated.

"They've got us blocked off!" Solo said sharply. "If I throw the bomb, it won't stop them all."

Illya looked around quickly.

The three agents had stopped now. They stood in the center of the room, surrounded by the wildly dancing young people, the bands beating a frenzied rhythm. Everywhere in the room the strange teenagers in the leather jackets seemed to have come up out of the floor. Then there was a voice.

"Looks like you need the Paul Revere act again, Dads."

Joe Hooker had come up to them.

"I know the back way. Make with the feet, fast!"

They nodded. Solo suddenly threw his bomb. Smoke billowed up in a great cloud in the room.

The screaming began.

Illya, Solo and Mahyana followed Joe Hooker toward the rear, under the rear bandstand, and, crouched low, emerged into a concrete corridor.

Two black-jacketed teenagers appeared with guns at the far end of the corridor, their eyes blazing insane joy.

"This way!" Hooker cried.

Illya snapped off two quick shots from his Special at the two black jackets. The two did not even duck. But they did not fire; they just came forward at a trot. Illya turned and ran after the others.

They came out of a door into a dark parking lot. Behind them black-jacketed teenagers poured into the corridor like a boiling river. Now they began to howl like wild beasts on the trail of food.

The three agents raced across the parking lot, Joe Hooker with them.

Mahyana stumbled, fell.

Joe Hooker stopped to help her.

Another horde of teenagers, all in black jackets, poured around the corner of the building. Illya and Solo stopped for a second. Hooker and Mahyana were up again and running.

"They're cut off!" Illya cried.

"We can't help now; too many of them."

"Run, Napoleon!" Illya cried.

Solo ran. Illya ran behind him. They reached the far side of the parking lot, where there were buildings and a street. Solo went around the corner of the first building, with Illya twenty yards behind him. Illya cried out.

I'll lead them off. They can see me!"

Solo did not pause. He knew that Illya was right. He, out front, could turn the next building and be out of sight. The raging, howling mob behind was too close to Illya. The weird horde of black-jackets had already swarmed over Mah-

yana and Joe Hooker. One of them had to remain free.

Solo turned the corner. He was out of sight for a full thirty seconds.

Illya came around the corner, the mob in close pursuit.

Solo had vanished.

Smiling grimly, Illya ran on down the dark Sydney street. They were persistent, the teenagers behind him, not like a simple mob, but Illya was a trained athlete and he slowly pulled away. He ran on toward the outskirts of Sydney.

The mob poured after him.

For a long minute the dark street was filled with howling, raging black jackets. Ten teenagers forced Joe Hooker and Mahyana into a black car that appeared from nowhere. The street shook as the horde poured on after the fleeing Illya Kuryakin.

Then, suddenly, the street was empty again, silent.

Nothing moved on the dark Sydney street under the Southern sky.

Silence.

Then a manhole cover opened slowly. Napoleon Solo climbed out into the night. Alone, he listened for a moment, then turned and walked quickly away in the opposite direction.

TWO

THE SUN ROSE slowly over Sydney. In his hotel room, Napoleon Solo spoke urgently into the

tiny radio set in his hand, the two threadlike antennae extended.

"Bubba, this is Sonny! Come in, Bubba. Report, Bubba. Come in, come in, this is Sonny."

Solo pressed the receive button. There was only silence. He rubbed his chin. The set had a range of five miles on local transmission. Illya knew that Solo would be in the hotel. But Solo had been trying to raise the small Russian for hours. By now, if Illya had escaped the mob, he should have managed to make his way to within five miles of the hotel.

"Bubba, come in. Sonny is here, come in. Bubba?"

There was only silence.

Solo made a tiny adjustment on his miniature set and pressed the send button again.

"Anzac, this is Sonny. Come in."

He pressed the receive button.

Immediately a crisp female voice spoke.

"Sonny, this is Anzac control."

Solo spoke urgently to the girl at U.N.C.L.E. in Sydney. "Has Bubba called in?"

"No report from Bubba," the crisp female voice said. "A report to the Sydney police detailed a riot at The Bedlam. Many hurt—no mention of Agents Kuryakin or Myana. The report stated that a musician, one Joseph Hooker, was missing."

Solo thought for a moment. Then he pressed his send button again. "Overseas relay to New York, Section-I priority."

"Immediately, Sonny," Anzac control said.

Solo waited. The room had come to seem stifling now. Where was Illya? Had they caught him? And where were Mahyana and Joe Hooker? Dead—or just captured? There was one hope: THRUSH always tried to capture U.N.C.L.E. agents if it could.

Solo paced. Joe Hooker was of no use to THRUSH. Solo only hoped the bearded musician had the sense to let them think he was with U.N.C.L.E. It would be safer for now. Solo paced. Where was he to go from here? The only lead was The Bedlam, and with his escape they would have abandoned The Bedlam by now. He had to have a lead.

The tiny transmitter-sender wailed its undulating bell-like signal. He pressed the receiving button.

"Sonny, overseas relay from New York. Proceed," Anzac control said.

"Are you there, Solo?" the familiar voice of Waverly said.

"Yes, I'm here, sir. Illya is missing. They have Agent Mahyana, African Section-II, and a musician named Hooker."

The voice of Waverly showed no emotion. "Very well, Mr. Solo. Section-II, South Pacific, will conduct a search for Mr. Kuryakin. However, I think we must continue with our problem. I have a possible area of investigation for you."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. He did not protest. In the work of U.N.C.L.E. only the problem counted. The people were expendable—all, including Waverly, if that had to be.

"With the aid of South Pacific Section-II we have identified the suit worn by the council member N in your picture. A tailor in Sydney, one Max Booth, verifies that he made it. We do not wish to approach Booth for details with local people. So I think it should be in your hands."

"Yes, sir," Solo said.

The tiny set went silent. Solo looked at it for a moment. Then he went to work. His weapons in order, a clean suit on, he left the hotel and walked out into the Australian sun.

A simple check of the telephone

directory showed that the shop of Max Booth was only a few blocks from the hotel. The hotel clerk informed Solo that Booth was a very good, if expensive, tailor.

Solo found the small, exclusive shop without incident. He walked in, the picture of the young executive looking for a suit. A small, wizened man hurried to him.

"Yes, sir?"

"I'd like a suit," Solo said simply.

The small man cocked his head. "American? May I ask how you heard of me?"

"Through a friend. He saw one of your suits on a man he met and liked it," Solo said.

"You know this man who wore my suit?"

"No, but he was small, thin, about sixty, I'd say. My friend thought he was an industrial scientist, probably a chemist. They were at a chemical convention."

"Ah," Max Booth said. "Yes, small, thin and a chemist. I made him a fine tweed."

Solo nodded, "That was it, a good tweed. Just what I had in mind. What did you say his name was?"

"Fitzhugh, Marcus Fitzhugh," Max Booth said. "A very wealthy man. One of my best customers. Ah, he's a great man, is Mr. Fitzhugh."

Max Booth turned and walked back toward a curtained fitting room. "Tweed, you say? Well, perhaps we can suit you. Of course it will take some weeks. I have a long list."

Solo spoke to the tailor. "He has a strange voice, this Mr. Fitzhugh?"

The tailor stopped, turned. "Voice? Hardly, young man. Marcus Fitzhugh is a deaf-mute. Are you sure you have the right man?"

"I never met him myself," Solo said, but he was thinking of something else. A deaf-mute! Of course. No wonder they had no record in the files of that voice! A man like Marcus Fitzhugh was certainly in U.N.C.L.E.'s files, but without a voice to cross-reference!

Marcus Fitzhugh never spoke in public, he had said that to himself! No wonder. Now all he had to do was contact Waverly and run a check on Marcus Fitzhugh. The man was sure to be in the files. All—

Solo looked up. The tailor was gone. His sixth sense was suddenly alert. It had been too easy. The tailor had told him too much. Why? To throw him off guard. It was a trap.

Solo whirled, half ran for the door. He reached the door and opened it. No one was in the shop or on the street. He pulled on the door knob.

A puff of cool vapor struck his face.

Solo froze like a statue with his hand still on the doorknob. He could see, think, but he could not move.

Illya waited four hours in the dank cellar of the Sydney slum. The mob did not return. By the time Illya cautiously left the shelter of the cellar the sun was up over the city. He took out his miniature sender-receiver.

"Sonny, this is Bubba. Come in?"

He pressed the receive-button. There was no response. Illya put his tiny set away. Napoleon had certainly gone back to the hotel if he had escaped. The hotel was out of range, and so was Anzac control from here.

Carefully, cleaning up his clothes as much as possible, he worked his way toward the center of Sydney. The people going to work stared at him. He knew he must look odd —a small, blond man wearing a black shirt and tight black trousers all stained with mud.

To be sure, Illya took evasive action every time a long black car came near. He wondered about Mahyana and Joe Hooker. He felt angry about the innocent young musician. Still, they would probably be safe enough for now. THRUSH would want to "talk" to them.

His progress was slow. The sun was halfway up the morning sky when he reached the range of the hotel. He took out his radio set again and raised the two threadlike antennae. He sat in a hidden doorway to be unobserved.

"Sonny, this is Bubba! Sonny, come in."

Solo did not answer. Illya felt cold. He made the tiny adjustment on his set.

"Anzac, this is Bubba."

The female voice was cool. "Bubba, Anzac control. Where are you?"

"Safe," Illya said. "Have you heard from Sonny?"

"Yes, an hour ago. He was instructed by New York to proceed to Max Booth's tailoring shop. Are you well?"

"As well as can be expected," Illya said drily. "Any word on Mahyana or Hooker?"

"None on Agent Mahyana. Hooker is reported missing."

"No other word?"

"No. You are coming in? Arrange contact."

"No," Illya said grimly. "I am not coming in."

He clicked off his set and went to the nearest telephone. He located the address of Max Booth's shop. As fast as he could he walked toward the shop. The address was in range of his radio set, and Napoleon had not answered. Illya walked faster.

When he reached the street of Max Booth's shop he stopped. The street was deserted. That was strange at this hour. Then he saw the policeman directing traffic away from the street. What had happened? Had something happened to Napoleon? He was about to approach the policeman, when he saw the long black car drive up.

The policeman waved this one car through!

Illya flattened back against the wall in the shadow, where he could see the street.

The black car glided to a halt in front of a shop. It was Max Booth's tailor shop! Illya watched. Moments later two men—a giant and a big, dark-haired man—came out of the tailor shop. Napoleon Solo walked between them.

Except that Napoleon was not walking. He was being carried by the two men—carried upright, rigid, like a statue carved out of stone.

Behind the two men, and the grotesque Solo, Illya saw a third man. This man was small, thin. The small man turned to look up and down the street. Illya shuddered. The man's face was only half a face—the left half was a mass of scar tissue.

The three men pushed Solo into the black car, climbed in after him. The car turned and came back the way it had come. As it paused at the corner near Illya, the policeman who had been directing traffic, suddenly jumped into the car.

The car roared away.

But in the instant of pause to pick up the policeman, Illya had run quickly to a parked car. It was only a matter of seconds for the blond U.N.C.L.E. agent to press his small, round electronic circuit activator to the ignition. The car started with a roar.

Illya drove off in pursuit of the black car.

THREE

SOLO WAS AWARE of all that was happening. He could see the giant shape of Gotz in the front seat, the man in police uniform driving. He could see the big, deep-voiced chief agent of THRUST on his right, and the small, thin, horribly disfigured man on his left. The small man had not yet spoken, but Solo knew that this was Council Member N—Marcus Fitzhugh, famous and respected scientist and industrialist.

He was aware of the barren land. It stretched all around the speeding car as far as the eye could see. Bleak, hot and dry, with twisted trees. Low sand hills, patches of tough grass, rocks and glaring clay. Here and there tall structures stood above the parched earth. They were, Solo guessed, the heads of mine shafts. This was Central Australia.

It looked more like the surface of Mars—deserted, barren, malignant.

He was aware of it, as he had been aware of the whole trip the thousand miles or more from Sydney. First the black car to a small airport, then the cargo aircraft with the car loaded right in it, then the hours of driving since they had landed here in the center of nowhere—a nowhere that looked like

the borders of hell. A dry, empty land like the white and glaring land around Green River, Wyoming.

He was aware of all this, and of the fact that he was alone.

But he could neither speak nor move.

Rigid, propped upright in the seat, even the muscles of his eyes were frozen; he could see only what was directly ahead of him. But his brain was as clear and active as ever, and he could hear.

Marcus Fitzhugh talked in that horrible hissing voice. "You see, Solo, your escape was only temporary. You have caused us far too much trouble. Because of you we have lost men, have had to close down two of our operational centers, and been put to all the inconvenience of chasing you. Such foolishness slows down my work."

"It won't slow us down long," the deep voiced chief agent said. "Gotz has a score to settle with Mr. Solo."

"First we learn what he knows," Marcus Fitzhugh said. "And this time, Herarra, we must not fail. This time we have all the time we need."

"He won't get out of The Belly," Herarra said. "Gotz will make him talk."

"Just keep your monster in hand, Herarra. We want answers, not smashed bones—not at first," Marcus Fitzhugh said.

Solo tried to move. He forced the orders from his clear brain to his muscles. He did not move a hair. His brain reeled with the effort. It was no use. The drug they had used rendered him totally rigid. He heard Marcus Fitzhugh laugh—a terrible sibilant sound like escaping air.

"I believe an eyelid actually twitched that time, Mr. Solo," Fitzhugh said. "You are a remarkable man. I can't remember when anyone managed even a hair twitch under that particular little drug of mine. Yes, a remarkable man. It is too bad. Our poor stupid Maxine was right: it is too bad you are U.N.C.L.E."

The disfigured industrialist laughed his reedy hiss again. "But, I too am a remarkable man. The world failed to see that. Because I am disfigured, my larynx and vocal chords destroyed, they think I am only a freak. The fools!

"The fools, they believe the accident in my laboratory not only made me a horror to look at, but a

deaf-mute. And I was mute. This voice you hear, terrible though it is, is a voice I created for myself. Yes, I built a new power of speech with plastic and metal. I can do as much for others, and I will when we of THRUSH rule this stupid world.

"We must rule because we can rule. Have you read Plato? Of course you have. He was a genius. Only those who can rule should rule. The herd cannot rule. Look at what they have done? Stupid children are allowed to run free, to do as they want. What idiocy! Children, teenagers, must be shaped, told, commanded."

Solo tried again. His brain commanded, cajoled, begged his muscles to move. It was no use. He could do nothing but listen to this madman, stare at the back of Gotz's bull neck. The sight of the giant made him as afraid as he could be. He had seen the look in the pig eyes of the giant. Gotz would not forgive him for having knocked him out. That blow would have killed anyone on earth except the giant.

Solo felt the car turn off the dirt road into a smaller one. Clouds of dust rose in the hot Australian air. The car bucked and slewed, but Solo felt nothing. It was his hope. They would have to free him from this paralyzing drug to torture him. His only hope was that they would torture him, not kill him at once.

He strained again. Useless. Marcus Fitzhugh laughed his hissing laugh. Solo stared ahead beyond the bull neck of the giant to where the desolate countryside was visible as the car climbed a small hill. Sky and sand hills and glaring sun—a vast, empty desert. Not a stick of cover anywhere, only the tall mine shafts standing up against the blue sky.

This time they had searched him completely, removed everything except his clothes. If he ever got free, that would be their mistake. The thin thread of silicon carbide woven carefully into his trousers, saw edged and hard enough to cut all but a diamond. The loop of the same material, thin as a hair, that was, in the hands of an expert, a deadly weapon, and that was sewn, woven, into his jacket.

"Well, my dear Solo, here we are. There you see my true home. The Belly, they called it when there were people here. There are no people within two hundred miles. I saw to that. They called it The Belly because that is what it is —a great belly inside the earth. No hill, just flat earth, unseeable from the air or anywhere."

Solo saw it ahead. A shabby mine-shaft exactly like all the other they had passed. Yet there was a difference. To his trained eyes the shabby shaft was not wood at all, but metal. The dilapidated two-by-four hanging at the top was a radio antennae. The circular shaped bucket lift was a radar pickup.

There was nothing else as far as

he could see except flat land—treeless, coverless, empty.

And he could guess that beneath the disguised mine shaft was the stronghold of Marcus Fitzhugh. Hidden in the bowels of a flat earth, with no clues as to its location from land or sky—The Belly.

FOUR

TO ILLYA KURYAKIN the desolate country looked like the arid deserts in the southern part of Siberia. He had been to that harsh area once on a job before he came to U.N.C.L.E., and he had thought then that there was no land on earth so abandoned, forgotten, like a piece of some distant and dead planet. But he had been wrong, this land was as utterly desolote and silent.

To follow them had been as difficult as it had been bizarre. First to the airport near Sydney, where he had managed to attach the directional signal device to the black car before it had been loaded into the giant cargo plane. Then in the air, at the controls of the fast Beechcraft, maintaining contact by the directional signal and by radar.

Finally he had found a man at the bush airport, where they had landed, who had a battered jeep—for a price.

Now he drove along the dusty road, with the very faint cloud of dust from the black car far ahead. He drove much too far behind them to be detected, following his directional signal. Grimly he continued the long chase, awaiting only the chance to move in with some hope of success.

There had been time in Sydney only to report the description of the small man with the disfigured face. After Sydney, the distance had become too great, and there had been no time anyway. Only at the bush airport had he managed to leave a message—a carefully coded message locating where he was, that would be telephoned to U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters in Sydney.

There was nothing more he could do now but follow the black car, check his weapons, and hope.

The distant, faint dust cloud continued to move steadily across the vast and deserted land. The glare of the sun reflected as if from water. Nothing at all moved in the land, not an animal, not a lizard.

Illya had not seen a human being or a house since leaving the bush airport—and they had been driving all day. At least a hundred and fifty miles had been covered already without a trace of human life or habitation.

The sun itself was low in the sky when, at last, the signal on his direction finder told him that the black car had turned off the dusty main road. Illya slowed down. If they were looking for pursuers it would be now that they would leave a man to check. From the aspect of the countryside, he guessed

that any vehicle would be suspect, it was that deserted.

He drove ahead very slowly, letting the car move on ahead of him. The beep of the direction signal showed that the car ahead was proceeding slowly and at right angles to the road they had been travelling. The only danger was that it would move out of range before he found the side road, but he did not think that was likely at the speed it was maintaining now.

Then the car ahead stopped.

Illya stopped, leaned down to listen closely to his direction finder. There was no doubt, the signal was no longer moving. The black car had stopped somewhere less than ten miles ahead. Illya started the jeep and moved on very slowly. Then he stopped again. There was no sense in taking chances by being too hasty. The sun was low; he could wait for night. And he would avoid the road ahead if he could.

He got out of the battered jeep. He took out the small box of the miniature direction finder all U.N.C.L.E. field agents carried disguised as a box of wooden matches. With the small box in his left hand, and his U.N.C.L.E. Special, loaded, cocked, and ready in his right hand, he left the jeep and the road and started out across the hot land.

There was no cover, but he did not think they would look for a man on foot. In any case, it was a chance he had to take. The open, completely empty aspect of the country worked for him as well as against him. There were no high hills, no trees, no cover of any kind for an observer. There were only low, flat rises bare on top, and shallow gullies that might once have contained water.

He moved ahead, taking advantage of every gully, every hollow. It was slow work, and the last rays of sun beat down on his bare head. Already the air was growing chill. He stumbled ahead, his head broiling in the sun, his body beginning to feel the chill of approaching night.

The sun was like a copper disk sitting on the horizon of the yellow land when Illya topped a low rise and saw it ahead. He dropped to his face at once. Slowly, then, he raised his head to look again. He rolled behind a small boulder and looked.

It was a shaft-head, like all the others he had passed, but not quite like them. His trained eye detected the radio antenna, the radar disk, the solidity of the seemingly broken down building.

And the black car was parked in front.

As he watched, the man in the policeman's uniform appeared from out of the shaft-head and walked to the car. The car moved off and vanished behind the building. Illya waited for it to appear on the other side. It did not. He backed off down below the crest of the small rise, circled, and looked again.

There was nothing behind the shaft-head. The car had vanished.

Illya bent to his direction finder. It was still operating, the faint *bee-beep-bee-beep* showing that the car was close by, even though he could not see it. He crawled back down into the hollow behind the small rise to wait for the night.

Night came in this barren land as it came to all deserts, suddenly and completely. One moment there was light and the last heat of the long day; the next instant there was only darkness and the rising cold chill of night.

Illya checked his weapons; the Special, his small bombs, the camera, his tiny radio, the thermite foil in his shoe, the special belt, and all the other miniature devices that made all U.N.C.L.E. agents walking arsenals.

Then he stood up and moved off in the night.

He reached the shaft-head without incident. There was no guard above ground. He found the disguised elevator. It looked exactly like an abandoned shaft elevator, but Illya touched its walls and found them solid steel.

It was locked. In the night he considered. He could break into the elevator, but there were probably alarms. Anyway, the operation of the elevator would certainly be noticed.

He went back out of the shaft-head and began to search the area in a wide circle, his infra-red flashlight revealing the ground but not revealing his presence. At last he found what he wanted—a cleverly disguised inspection ladder which ran down the inside wall of the elevator shaft. With a deep breath, moving very slowly, he started to climb down.

He lowered himself a long distance. At last he felt the in-rush of cool air. It was probably an air-conditioning intake, which meant that he had to leave the elevator shaft before he reached the air-conditioning unit which evidently fed into the passage. At the first cross-duct he turned and crawled

until he found a grill. He burned the grill off, dropped down.

He stood in a darkened corridor of steel. Far off he heard the sound of machinery. He bent to his direction finder. The signal was strong from the left. He moved cautiously to his left. He heard and saw no one. Whoever operated this hidden center was highly confident.

Illya smiled. They would find that even here in the center of nowhere, they were not safe.

The signal grew stronger.

He rounded a corner carefully and saw an opening ahead. There was a faint light inside. The car must be inside the opening. Illya moved carefully. He reached the opening and looked in.

He saw a bare room with a single tiny spotlight.

In the center of the bare steel floor, in a small circle of bright light, was a tiny object. Illya stared at it, and froze.

The object was his tiny directional signal device!

It lay there, the only object in the bare room.

A hand clamped on his neck. A giant hand. He twisted. A second hand gripped his waist as if he were no bigger than a toothpick. Other hands worked swiftly, stripping him. He was held there naked while something was passed over his body—a metal detector. Helpless and naked he waited.

Then he was flung forward. He lay on the floor beside his directional signal. His clothes were flung after him, shirt, trousers and belt, all searched.

The small spotlight went out.

"Welcome, Mr. Kuryakin," a horrible inhuman voice hissed. "Rest now. You can join your friends later."

And the hissing laugh chilled the darkness.

ACT IV
A POWER OF TEN

THE LOUD MACHINERY pounded somewhere all night. It seemed to pound in Illya Kuruakin's brain. He dreamed of witches and giant hands. He floated helpless in a cauldron of blinding sun and empty dark.

When he opened his eyes he saw that he was not alone. Nor was he lying down in the room where he had been caught.

"Hello, Illya," Solo said. "Welcome to the club."

They were all standing against the walls, one in the center of each wall. They were shackled to the walls, spread-eagled, wrists and ankles shackled. Illya faced Napoleon Solo across the small room. Mahyana stood pale against the wall to Illya's left.

Joe Hooker was shackled to the wall to Illya's right.

"We seem to be caught," Illya said, still half stupefied.

Joe Hooker looked sad. "Man, I thought you could run faster. When

I stopped for the chick, they put me away."

A voice seemed to come from the ceiling. The hissing voice of Marcus Fitzhugh.

"Mr. Hooker, I truly regret your part in this. I realize now that you were merely a helpful American. But, alas, it is too late. You must, I fear, share the fate of your Uncles."

Illya looked up at the ceiling. "Please, spare us the bad jokes. We have troubles enough."

"Of course, Mr. Kuryakin," Marcus Fitzhugh said.

The small, disafigured man had suddenly appeared inside the steel room. They all blinked. A door in the wall had opened and closed so quickly they had not seen it. Marcus Fitzhugh was not smiling. His hissing voice came seriously.

"I apologize. No jokes, no sadistic toying with helpless victims. And I will not reveal all you need to know about *PowerTen*. Those movie villains are so ridiculous, aren't they? Who knows—you might still escape, and then wouldn't I seem foolish?

"You understand the program ahead, I'm sure. You all have knowledge we can use,—Mr. Hooker excepted, of course. We will torture you, one way or another, until you tell us or die. That is it. Naturally, we will try to keep you alive as long as possible, but we are only human.

"You will die whether you tell us or not. It is really only a matter of pain. We have drugs; we shall try to break down your conditioning. Miss Mahyana may not be conditioned, my Agent Herrara tells me. And I will not insult either her or you gentlemen by suggesting you talk to spare her pain. I think we are all aware that the stakes are far too high for chivalry. Miss Mahyana, I'm sure, knew what she was getting into when she joined you.

"So, that is the schedule. It begins at once. First, experts want to study your pain threshholds, so we can make an intelligent working schedule. For that, you will all go together this time, Mr. Hooker again excepted. You will only be killed, Mr. Hooker."

Joe Hooker said, "How do I thank you, let me count the ways. Is the creepy one for real?"

"I am afraid he is very much for real, Joe," Illya said.

Marcus Fitzhugh did not answer either of them. The small, disfigured man with the metal-and-plastic voice had vanished through the same swift and silent secret door. There was a silence in the steel room.

Suddenly, as if pushed, flung down, all four prisoners fell forward to the steel floor. The chains had been removed by some remote control. There was a sharp rattling sound as the shackles scraped the walls, steel against steel.

From where they lay, their muscles cramped from the long chain-

ing, the four prisoners watched as the shackles and chains vanished into the walls.

Illya stood up. He had been chained the shortest time and he was not numbered like the others. He crossed to where the shackles had been. There was nothing but smooth wall. His slender fingers could feel no trace of a break. He crossed the room to where he thought the door was. The wall was smooth, unbroken, not a hairline crack.

"Excellent engineering," Illya said.

"Excellent methods," Solo said. "Not even a guard to unshackle us and give us a chance to jump him. All done with mirrors."

"Electronics and complicated engineering," Illya said. "And what is complicated is easiest to sabotage. It is typical of THRUSH to equate complexity with efficiency and progress. Of course, they have us under surveillance and voice monitor. Is that not so, Mr. Fitzhugh?"

It was the deep voice that answered. "Quite true, Kuryakin. And I don't think you will sabotage us. Mr. Fitzhugh is preparing for you now. I'm sure Gotz will enjoy another meeting with Solo."

Silently the hidden door slid open. They waited, the four prisoners, but nothing happened. Then the voice of Herrara came again.

"Step out, except Hooker."

They looked at each other.

"Come on," Herrara's voice said impatiently. "We can prod you, but why make it hard? You might just as well walk where we tell you."

Illya shrugged, "Why not? Come."

The three agents stepped out through the door, which instantly closed behind them, shutting off Joe Hooker. But the door did not close fast enough to stop the bearded boy's gallant parting message.

"Stay loose, Dads," Joe Hooker said.

Then they were alone in a long silent corridor. They walked ahead. As they neared the end of this corridor another door slid open. They passed through, and the door closed behind them. Smoothly and simply they were forced along corridors by doors that opened and closed. The steel corridors were smooth and doorless. They were under constant scrutiny. At last they entered a series of corridors that were different.

"Keep walking," Herrara's voice said.

They had seen no human being, nothing they could attack even with bare hands. Herded by opening and closing doors, watched on closed-circuit television, they marched now in corridors that reminded them of U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters. There were doors, windowless and smooth but marked with small metal plaques. Casu-

ally, Illya looked at the plaques on the doors.

At last, after what seemed like a walk of a mile in the maze of corridors, a door opened and they saw the figure of the giant Gotz standing before them.

TWO

THERE WERE three men in the torture room. The giant Gotz, and two smaller men in white coats. All around the walls were the instruments of torture—some old, like a simple hot iron glowing white in its brazier, some new, like a simple square box with electrodes for the temples.

Gotz was grinning, his eyes fixed on Napoleon Solo. One of the men in white stared at Illya, and the third man seemed to wet his puffy lips as he watched Mahyana enter the room. The voice of Marcus Fitzhugh came over the speaker.

"Now we will learn about your pain levels," Fitzhugh said. "The three men who will, ah, accomodate you, have been very carefully chosen. Gotz, of course, will enjoy his work on Solo. The man staring at Kuryakin is a former Soviet scientist Mr. Kuryakin was involved in exiling in his early days. The third man takes particular pleasure in handling women, especially pretty ones. Proceed, gentlemen."

Gotz stepped forward, his huge hands reaching first for Napoleon Solo.

"Now!" Solo snapped.

With a leap, turn, and karate cry, Solo delivered a perfect karate kick to Gotz's stomach. The giant doubled over, but did not fall. Solo smashed an elbow thrust into the giant's face. Gotz staggered. Breathing heavily now, Solo kicked the giant where it would hurt the most. Gotz screamed, doubled over.

Solo smashed the giant down with a two-handed blow to the back of the neck. The giant rested on hands and knees, trying to rise. Solo kicked him on the point of the chin. The bull neck gave way with a loud, sickening snap and Gotz collapsed.

While Solo had been struggling with the giant, Illya had disposed of his man with a single thrust to the throat. Mahyana had handled her man with a judo throw, hurling the startled sadist against a wall.

The attack had taken seconds, but already Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting. "Guards! Go in! You stupid fools! How can you escape! Guards!"

The door opened.

As if this were a signal they had been waiting for, Illya and Solo leaped to either side of the door. Their actions were quick, smooth, automatic, with no need to have planned it with talk.

The guards ran in. Two guards armed with machine-pistols. Solo

chopped one. Illya tripped the other, kicked him in the face as he tried to rise. Mahyana had the two guns. They were through the door just before it closed.

"The left corridor!" Illya cried out.

Mahyana handed one machine-pistol to Solo.

Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting. "They are out! Blue alert!"

Alarms clanged.

"Where are we going?" Mahyana gasped.

"There is always an Achilles heel," Illya said. "I know where it is."

Four guards appeared. Solo and Mahyana shot them down. The girl took a bullet that creased her shoulder, drawing quick blood. Illya had reached a door they had passed earlier.

The Russian tore at his belt—the belt they had left him when they took all they thought was a weapon. He tore off a piece of the belt, pulled a thread on the edge, and shouted.

"Back, flat down!"

They fell to the floor. A shattering explosion shook the steel corridor. The door in front of them blew open with the force of the powerful explosive. The special belt was an explosive in itself, fused by the threads at the edge. The three agents were up and through the door.

Mahyana stared at the small, closet-like room that seemed totally empty. "There's nothing in here; what—?" she cried.

Illya smiled. The Russian pointed to a large box against the wall. Metal conduit went in and out of the box. Thick sheafs of conduit like bundles of spaghetti.

"The main circuit box, fuses and all. The place is all electric, and this is the Achilles heel."

Illya Kuryakin took the rest of his belt, wrapped it over the metal box, and pulled the thread. He pushed Solo and Mahyana out into the corridor again.

Marcus Fitzhugh's voice hissed savagely. "There they are, Corridor 72, all—"

The explosion seemed to burst their ear-drums, shattering the steel walls, shaking the floor beneath them.

Then all was suddenly quiet.

Illya and Solo raised their heads.

The alarms had stopped. The voice on the loudspeaker had been cut off. The noise of air-conditioning and distant machinery ceased. The underground complex was as silent as a tomb.

"And blind," Illya said. "All their power is off. Now they are deaf and blind, no better than we."

"Look!" Solo said.

All down the corridor doors stood open. Illya laughed.

"I expected that. The doors are spring loaded and open when the power is off."

"All the doors are open?" Mahyana said.

"I'm sure of it. Now, all we have to do is evade the guards. First we leave this corridor. Our position is reported. I don't imagine they have many guards, they would rely on their electronic devices in this wilderness."

They moved quickly and silently until they had put three other corridors between them and the point of the explosion. They had seen no one, but they could hear voices somewhere. Illya faced Mahyana.

"I think the main elevator shaft is straight ahead. It will be out of order, but there will be a cable to climb. They will expect us to break out. That is your job, Mahyana. Go up the cable, try to reach the surface."

"And you?" Mahyana said.

"We came here for a reason," Solo said. "We can't leave without trying to find out what *PowerTen* is."

"But—" the girl said.

"No *but,* my dear," Illya said. "We have to try."

The brown-skinned girl nodded and turned without another word. She slung the machine pistol over her shoulder, and entered the open door of the elevator shaft. Then she was gone.

"This way, I think, Napoleon," Illya said. "The sound of machinery has to be the manufacturing area, and it is this way."

The two agents moved silently along the corridors. Twice they encountered pairs of armed guards. They killed them quickly and simply with bursts from the machine-pistols. They had five machine-pistols now.

At last they came to their goal. A great cavern was hollowed out beneath high steel walkways. Complex chemical equipment stood silent, motionless below. Men down there moved frantically trying to make repairs.

Illya located the office and laboratory. They shot down the three guards there. Solo laid all the machine pistols on the floor beside the open door.

"Go ahead," Solo said. "I'll hold them off when they come. Mahyana will lead them off for a time, but they'll be back."

Solo lay on the floor, the machine-pistols ready. Illya began to search the office-laboratory.

All was silent in the vast underground complex called The Belly.

Until the voice hissed, "I admire you, gentlemen. Perhaps you could have escaped."

Marcus Fitzhugh stood in the room, a Luger in his hand. He stood there behind Solo, facing Illya. Behind him Herrara held Mahyana. There were two other guards behind them. They all stood before an opening in the office wall that had not been there.

"You see, Mr. Kuryakin, not all our little secrets were operated on the main power lines. I was aware of our weak spot. I prepared a small circuit of secret corridors on

standby power. It seems I was wise. You will now please stand closer together, and do not attempt to reach those weapons."

Fitzhugh smiled again, his horribly burned face twisting with a certain admiration. His hissing voice spoke quietly.

"You will be killed at once, of course. But such devotion to duty deserves the reward of knowledge. You want to know about *PowerTen?* Very well, I will tell you."

THREE

SOLO AND ILLYA stood there and looked at each other as they heard the nature of *PowerTen.*

"So you see, it is really a very interesting substance. Once ingested it will raise any neurotic impulse to a power of ten—ten times the urge, the obsession, the drive of the normal neurosis. Think of it! I can see that Mr. Kuryakin understands the chemical data I have outlined, but for Mr. Solo and Miss Mahyana, let me simplify.

"Like the alkaloids, say marijuana or peyote, it induces a state of heightened hysteria. However, unlike anything else known, it has the effect of hypnosis—it can be directed. Under its influence a man can be made to do what he is instructed, mindlessly and without fear or hesitation, provided the tendency was already there.

"For example, if some young man, obviously neurotic and disturbed by the power structure of our foolish world, is given *PowerTen* he will kill a political leader he only wanted to defy before he took the drug. You see the implications? All we have to do is locate young people with the neurotic desire to defy, steal, attack, rebel, destroy, give them *PowerTen*—and tell them to do what they desire. They will do it!"

Illya nodded slowly. "Happily, without remorse or hesitation. They will feel exhilarated."

"Precisely!" Marcus Fitzhugh said eagerly. "And certain subjects can even be directed to do specific acts, as you well know

from our recent results with the African president, the gold theft, the laboratory fire, and the deputy chief.

"Certain subjects?" Solo said.

Fitzhugh frowned, his grotesque face distorted. "At present the drug is still under development. You see, at the moment it will only work on the young, the teenagers. That is because older people have more resistance. They are under longer social conditioning. They sub consciously resist the effects of the drug. But the young! Ah, they are so eager, so vulnerable, they have not had the time to become emotionally cautious."

"The tendency must be there?" Illya said. "Then that—"

"Explains the suicides, the mad swimming out to sea, of course," Fitzhugh said. "The drug is still in its early stages. We have to experiment. When we gave it to those young people it heightened their self destructive desire and they acted."

"And the black-jackets, the mob in New York?" Solo said. "This must be your great—"

"They are our triumph," Fitzhugh hissed in his un-human artificial voice. "I call them my teen corps. All are perfectly controlled subjects, as long as they get their dosage of *PowerTen*. They do exactly as we tell them. We find one in a hundred like that, and they are my pride. Once under the drug, they are my tools. You see, *PowerTen* is also an addictive drug!"

The disfigured genius laughed. "Like marijuana the drug can be ingested by smoking, by chewing, or by injection. Think of it, gentlemen! A drug that will enslave some, cause many to run wild and do what they only had a tendency to do before, cause others to destroy themselves with a smile!

"A drug which can be distributed in cigarettes, in chewing gum! All the eager, vulnerable young of the world, the unformed teenagers —they will be in our hands, and we will rule the earth with them! A world where we own the souls of all the young people!"

Illya shuddered in the silent office. Solo's hands twitched as if to reach out and strangle the evil genius with the un-human voice. A world of teenagers addicted to a drug controlled by THRUSH! Those who did not work for THRUSH would be destroyed by their own suicidal hands under its baleful influence.

"Conceived of it—all teenagers a weapon of THRUSH," Marcus Fitzhugh said. "Ruined, destroyed, rendered into mindless weapons who are happy when they kill and destroy! We will own them all! And I, Marcus Fitzhugh, will rule the council of THRUSH because *PowerTen* is my work, my secret! They are all mine, the teenagers of the world."

At that instant the noise sudden-

ly began again. The machinery below began to hum; alarms began to ring. Herrara walked to a box on the wall of the office and opened it to pull a switch and shut off the alarms. The power lines had been repaired.

Fitzhugh seemed to relax, his eyes calming and turned on Solo and Kuryakin. He raised his Luger.

This time the new voice spoke from behind the two guards holding Mahyana.

"Dad, you forgot one little teenager. Man, that was a real boo-boo."

Fitzhugh whirled, an automatic reaction.

The bearded face of Joe Hooker stood behind the two guards. Hooker leaped on the two guards. Mahyana threw one of them. Herrara, caught at the control box, was attacked by Solo. Illya went for the back of Fitzhugh.

But the disfugured insane genius recovered himself. Before Illya could reach him, he fired at Joe Hooker. Hit, the bearded boy was knocked over backwards.

Fitzhugh leaped forward, kicked Mahyana out of his path, and hurtled through the open door, which instantly closed behind him. The disfigured man was safe inside his special emergency corridors.

Illya swore softly. The rest of the enemy had been subdued. Solo stood now, holding a machine-pistol. Mahyana stood up, blood still on her shoulder, a dark bruise on her pretty face where Fitzhugh had kicked, Joe Hooker lay on the floor.

"Like, Dads, he got me some."

"Where?" Illya said, bending over the bearded boy.

"Nowhere, man, like the shoulder. It smarts, you know, like it was crazy. There I was in that box looking to meet the big banjo man, and, Shazam, the door opened! I split but quick, you know? All the doors was open and they just plain forgot about little Joe. I saw them taking the chick down some little passageways. I followed, and they never remembered. Crazy."

"Crazy," Illya said. "Can you walk?"

"If I can't I'll fly. Man, let's split this scene."

Solo had walked out to the steel walkway above the vast cavern of chemical machinery. Now he called out.

"Look!"

Below, on the floor of the vast chemical plant, Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting to the workers, waving his arms wildly. As one man, the workers began to run in a howling mob behind Fitzhugh.

They were running for the stairways, up toward the office.

FOUR

ILLYA RAN back to the control box Herrara had used to shut off the alarms. Quickly he pulled a switch and whirled.

"I've opened all the doors again. Run for the elevator as fast as you can. I don't know how much time we'll have."

"Go!" Solo commanded.

Solo helped Joe Hooker along the walkway and into the first corridor. Mahyana came behind them. All the doors were open again.

In the control office and laboratory Illya bent over a console of dials and gauges. He studied the labels for a moment, then quickly turned four dials to full open. The needles on the dials that controlled the process in the vast cavern below began to climb toward the red danger areas.

Illya ran after the others.

The first wave of workers was coming up the stairs from the factory floor below. Illya squeezed off a volley from the machine-pistol he carried.

The first four men screamed and fell back against those behind. Somewhere the hissing voice of Marcus Fitzhugh was shrieking in mad anger, forcing the workers on.

Illya raced down the corridors after the others. Two guards appeared in his path and he shot them down, their shots going wild above his head. Illya ran on over them without looking down. The mob of workers was crowding into the narrow steel corridor behind him.

An explosion somewhere behind on the floor of the cavern rocked the corridor. One of the pieces of equipment had gone up. Illya reached the elevator. He turned to fire one more burst before jumping into the elevator—and saw the thick cloud of greenish-yellow gas flowing along the narrow and windowless corridor.

Caught like rats in a narrow sewer, the mob of workers began to scream, to choke, as the gas flowed over them. The narrow corridor was like a long gas chamber.

Illya leaped into the elevator.

Solo closed the door and the elevator began to rise quickly.

Below them they could hear the screams and groans of the mob caught in the deadly gas from the exploded chemical equipment. Another explosion rocked the elevator shaft. The elevator slowed, hesitated, then surged upward. Moments later they were at the top. They stepped out into the fake shaft-head. It was daylight out in the world.

Joe Hooker slumped to the ground in the glaring sun.

Mahyana bent over, trying to catch a breath.

Another explosion shook the earth.

Below, faint and horrible, the screams and groans rose up to the sunlight from the bowels of the earth.

Illya pulled at Joe Hooker. "Hurry. I don't know how long we have before it all blows. That gas can still reach us."

"Lead on kindly light," Hooker said.

Staggering in the blazing heat of the sun, the four beaten, dishevelled refugees from the pit below moved across the desolate land, away from the disguised shaft-head. Every few yards the ground shook, heaved to explosions far below.

The screams of the dying continued to reach faintly to the surface. Streamers of greenish-yellow gas seeped up out of the elevator shaft behind them.

They reached the first low rise, from where Illya had first spied on The Belly. The sun blazed down. There was not a breath of wind. Mahyana, her shoulder bleeding again, the bruise on her face swollen, ugly, sagged to the ground. Hooker fell and lay there in the broiling sun.

"Can't we rest?" Mahyana gasped.

"Well, perhaps we are far enough, perhaps for a second or two we—"

Illya stopped. He and Solo stood there on the small rise of arid, burning land and looked back to the fake shaft-head.

Impossibly, unbelievably, four figures had emerged from the towering shaft-head, had come up somehow from the holocaust below.—The four wore gas masks and carried guns.

Even as Solo and Illya watched, prepare to battle the last attack, one of the figures tore off its gas mask and stood shaking its fist crazely toward them.

Marcus Fitzhugh stood in the sun and cursed the men who had destroyed his work.

It was the last gesture of his life.

There was a shuddering heave of the earth. Illya and Solo were knocked down.

Then the earth seemed to raise up under the blazing sun.

The tower of the shaft-head leaned, crashed down in a shower of debris.

The earth rose up: five feet, ten feet.

Heaved once more in a mammoth shuddering surge.

And collapsed.

Far off, the echo of the underground explosion reverberated through the sunny sky, bounced off the low sand hillocks, rolled away into the vast distance.

A great gaping hole lay before the eyes of the four prisoners who had escaped—a hole that still shivered and shook in the sun. All trace of the four enemies who had managed to come after them was gone. Marcus Fitzhugh would do no more work for anyone, unless it was for the devil.

From the gaping hole that was the only visible sign of the holocaust below, streams of gas seeped, lying heavy to the ground in the windless land.

"We had better move on," Illya said at last.

Solo helped Joe Hooker to his feet.

They staggered off in the blazing sun toward the distant road. Illya was not surprised to find his jeep gone.

After awhile they lost track of everything—everything but the endless miles and the searing sun. They staggered on, falling, getting up to stagger again. There was no water, no food. They had not eaten for a day. As far as their burning eyes could see there was nothing but emptiness.

"How long can we last, Dads?" Joe Hooker said.

"We'll last," Solo said.

"Don't put me on, Dad. I know. There isn't a living cat within two hundred miles, that hissing nut told me," Hooker said. "We'll never make two hundred miles."

"We will make it," Illya said.

"Leave me, Dads. I can't help no more. When you get back you can give me a medal. I always wanted a medal. One thing, like who've I been working for? I mean, who's the leader, Dads?"

"U.N.C.L.E.," Solo said. "But you've really worked for the whole world."

"You had better leave me, too," Mahyana said. "I can help Joe, and I slow you down. Get out and get help. Well try to stay alive."

Illya and Solo looked at each other. They knew that Hooker and Mahyana were right. Only Solo and Illya, trained and uninjured, could hope to make it out of this endless desert. And then the hope was slim. They had done their work, but was this the end?

"It will be very cold soon," Illya said. "Lie close together for the warmth. Move slowly, but keep moving as long as you can."

"Crazy," Hooker said, smiling weakly.

Mahyana suddenly stared upward at the glaring blue of the sky. Solo whirled. The helicopter seemed to slide sideways in the sky. They all stood and watched with their mouths open as the helicopter touched gently down not fifty yards away. A man stepped out and walked toward them.

Alexander Waverly said, "I see you accomplished your mission. I suggest we all leave this area without delay. I think the Australian people can clean up the miserable remains."

"Yes, sir," Solo said. "But how—"

Waverly tapped at his empty pipe. "I began to wonder about that Max Booth tailoring establishment. It seemed too simple. When I arrived in Sydney, Mr. Kuryakin's message was there. It was not too hard to identify Marcus Fitzhugh from the description."

"And you got my message about where we were?" Illya said.

"No, I'm afraid the man you entrusted that to was one of their men. However, the Australians managed to locate this particular

piece of Fitzhugh's property. He owned it in his own name. THRUSH can sometimes be so careless, almost arrogant. Now, shall we return to Sydney? Miss Mahyana is needed in Africa, I believe."

The owl-eyed U.N.C.L.E. leader turned and walked calmly back to the helicopter. Solo helped Joe Hooker. The bearded boy was staring after Waverly.

"Like, crazy," Joe Hooker said.

The bearded kid was in bad shape, but he could still manage a wan smile.

Looking at him, Illya nodded.

The forces of evil, all over the world, could do their damndest, he was thinking. But for every weakling they seduced, every poor unfortunate they trapped, the essential decency in mankind was bigger, stronger than all of them. In the end, it would have to destroy them.

It was a good thought. It would help to make bearable the memory of the unspeakable hours that had passed.

After awhile, the taut nightmare memories left Hooker and he could sleep.

The helicopter took off, circling once over the gaping hole in the vast wasteland that still steamed fingers of gas into the sky. Already, other helicopters were below as men in gas masks approached the ruined stronghold and factory of Marcus Fitzhugh.

"Thrush will need a new member of council, it seems," Waverly said. "Unfortunately, we need a new chief enforcement agent for Section-II, Africa. Would that appeal to you as a position, Miss Mahyana."

"Yes, sir, and thank you," the lithe brown girl said.

"We will have to watch for the remains of the teen corps," Illya said, his Russian mind still on the problem. "They will be very sick without their *PowerTen*."

"The hospitals have been alerted, and the police," Waverly said grimly.

"What about Maxine Trent?" Solo asked.

"Her body was found in the river," Waverly said, looking for his tobacco in his old tweed suit. "But I have my doubts it was really her, Mr—uh—Solo."

Solo smiled. He had his doubts that Maxine would be ended quite so easily. He thought he would probably meet her again. Strangely the thought did not displease him, deadly though she certainly was. A little danger was always interesting. And Maxine Trent was born for danger.

"You know, The Beavers are going to seem mighty square after you swingers," Joe Hooker said. "I mean, crazy."

The helicopter whirled off toward the jet that waited for them at the bush airport.

ROBERT VAUGHN

Here's a behind-the scenes, candid camera look at one of "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.'s" shining stars. Meet Robert Vaughn—alias Napoleon Solo!

by SIGMUND SMALLMAN

ROBERT VAUGHN, starring as romantic adventurer-hero Napoleon Solo in MGM-Arena's television series, "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.," is one of Hollywood's busiest, most widely respected young actors. The immensely popular suspense-mystery series, which tops all Neilsen ratings, has established him as one of TV's most popular personalities.

Regarded as an "actor's actor," Vaughn has won such honors as an Academy Award nomination for "Best Supporting Actor," the Laurel Award of Motion Picture Exhibitor magazine and a Golden Globe nomination by the Hollywood Foreign Press Club in the short span of his career thus far.

He was born in New York, of show business parents. His mother, Marcella Gaudel, was a Broadway star; his father, Walter Vaughn, was a noted radio actor.

Raised in Minneapolis by grandparents, Vaughn entered the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and soon found himself migrating to the drama department, where he starred in campus productions of "Hamlet," "Death Takes A Holiday" and "Knickerbocker Holiday."

While attending college in 1951, Vaughn won the Phillip Morris Inter-Collegiate radio acting contest; the victory caused him to abandon journalism studies in favor of acting.

Following a stretch of military

As

NAPOLEON SOLO,

U.N.C.L.E.'s

Top Agent,

ROBERT VAUGHN

is a

Dashing

Sophisticated

World-Rover

service, he signed with Columbia, for which he starred in "No Time To Be Young" and then won the prize role in Warner Brothers' "The Young Philadelphians," for which he received an Oscar nomination.

Vaughn's career took an immediate jump at this point. Beside motion pictures, he since has guest starred in some 250 top TV dramas, including "Playhouse 90," "The Eleventh Hour," "Rawhide," the "Dick Powell Show" and others. For a full season, he was a regular star with Gary Lockwood in MGM-TV's "The Lieutenant" series.

In films, Vaughn co-starred with Yul Brynner in "The Magnificent Seven" and, in 1963, he completed a top role in United Artists' "The Caretakers." In his spare time, Vaughn likes to get back on the legimate stage for a change of pace. He starred in the Los Angeles run of "Under The Yum Yum Tree" in 1962.

He has a special place in his heart reserved for teenagers, for it was the "yeah, yeah" bunch that literally made "The Man from

U.N.C.L.E." the hottest show on television.

Vaughn, who always embarks on one of Napoleon Solo's homicidal missions as if it were a shuffleboard match with a bevy of Playboy bunnies, is obviously quite happy with his success. Outside of having to have his sprawling house fenced-in to keep panting teenagers out of the territory, his life has been altered little by the Solo image.

There are two rumors Vaughn says he'd like scotched once and for all: "I am definitely not interested in a political career at this time. I just happen to love what I'm doing.

"Also, some uninformed writers have suggested there's a feud brewing between David McCallum and me," says Vaughn. "I suppose all shows in which there are two actors have to suffer through such rumors. We just laugh it off. Between us, we receive more than 70,000 letters a month from fans. David is very popular with the fans and he's marvelous on the show. Wouldn't I be crazy not to get along with a man who's made a major contribution to the success of a show which means so much to all of us?"

Though he lives far away from the shin-skinning, pulse-pounding world of Napoleon Solo, Vaughn doesn't have to act very hard to be believable in the role. His private life, lacking the danger of Solo's, still is probably as wordly. Vaughn, in his thirties, lives in solo bachelor splendor near Los Angeles, in a twelve-room house filled with antiques.

In the Next Issue—Complete and Exclusively Yours—

THE BEAUTY AND BEAST AFFAIR

A Thrilling New "Man From U.N.C.L.E." Novel

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

If you thrilled to the challenging, danger-packed "The Howling Teenagers Affair", if you like to follow Solo, Kuryakin and Alexander Waverly in their unending battle against the Evil called THRUSH—in short, if you like the kind of super-spy stories made famous in The Man from U.N.C.L.E.—don't fail to read the next great lead novel featuring them. It's titled "The Beauty and Beast Affair", and it's the kind of lightning-paced yarn you expect and deserve. Reserve your copy now!

THE PROPOSAL

by JAMES HOLDING

There are times when a single word can seal a man's destiny forever.

IT WAS ONE of the strangest answers to a proposal of marriage that a girl ever gave a man.

Yet for a long delicious moment, I didn't even notice its oddity. For I was the man who was doing the proposing. And I was so concerned with what Marjory's answer might be that I was momentarily oblivious to everything else she said.

I was understandably nervous, too, of course. After all, you don't propose marriage to a girl like Marjory lightly. She is tall and ash-blonde, with perfectly moulded features and a lovingly shaped figure. She is generously endowed, in addition, with the high intelligence and vivacity so rarely included in the same package with beauty like hers.

That explains why the unqualified part of her answer transported me immediately to the rosy heights of joy to which all accepted lovers traditionally soar. I was dizzy with the knowledge that Marjory, my beloved, had said in her alluring mezzo-soprano, "Oh, Joe, yes, yes. I'll gladly marry you!"

I folded her in my arms—we were sitting on a park bench at the time—and tried to show Marjory how overjoyed I was that she had promised to become my wife. She responded with enthusiasm. By the time we broke for air, almost a minute later, I had begun to realize at long last that Marjory had added a proviso, as it were, to her acceptance speech.

I kept my arm around her. I said, "What did you say, Marjory?"

"I didn't say anything," she answered. "How could I? You were kissing me."

"I don't mean just now. I mean

a minute ago when I asked you to marry me."

Marjory's violet eyes, luminous from the reflected light of a street lamp, gazed honestly into mine, hiding nothing, not even the spark of sadness and uncertainty they suddenly contained.

"I said, 'yes, I'll marry you—if you'll forgive me.' "

See what I mean? How about that for a crazy line? I'll marry you *if you'll forgive me*! "If I'll forgive you for what?" I asked her.

She was dead serious. "For being married before, Joe."

"Hell," I said, with the generosity of a benedict, "being married before is nothing. Of course I forgive you. So you got a divorce from some character who wasn't good enough for you."

"Not a divorce," Marjory said. "He's dead. I'm a widow."

Well, I'm not an abnormally sensitive man, but you'd think that even I would have been a little hurt that she'd waited until now to tell me she was a widow. After all, that's a fairly important vital statistic.

She laughed when she saw how startled and aggrieved I looked. "You're angry, Joe. Or are you jealous of a dead man?"

"I'm not jealous. I'm just surprised."

"And I don't blame you, Joe dear. It's true we haven't known each other very long, but I *do* love you. And I want to marry you. And I should at least have mentioned that I was a widow before this, I know. Believe me, I was strongly tempted to tell you sometimes."

I remembered the vagrant sadness. "Why didn't you?" I asked.

"I was ashamed to, Joe. And dreadfully afraid."

Before I could turn that over in my mind she went on hastily: "Perhaps I'd better tell you about Phil. Then you can decide whether you still want to marry me."

"Phil," I said. "Was that his name?"

"Yes—Phil Sampson. I'm really Mrs. Philip Sampson."

"And here I've thought all along you were just Miss Marjory Waring, Dr. Westmore's beautiful office nurse!"

"I took back my maiden name after Phil's death," she explained, "because I had to get another job, and there's an advantage in being a 'Miss' professionally."

"Never mind that," I said hastily. "I'm not asking you to justify anything, darling. But you used the word *ashamed* about your husband's death. Why?"

"Because I helped to kill him."

Well! Such a confession about a girl's first husband is not exactly reassuring to her prospective second. But, as I say, I loved her. So with an expression of incredulity on my face I said weakly, "You're kidding!"

She shook her head. "I helped

to kill Phil. That's why I have this terrible guilt feeling!"

She saw the look of horror in my eyes, and continued almost pleadingly: "Why don't you let me tell you about it all at once, Joe—instead of drawing it out of me in bits and pieces like this? I'll be glad to get it off my mind! If you only knew how I've been dying to tell somebody the truth! Even if it means losing you, Joe dear!"

I waited for her to proceed. But woman-like, she asked me to light her a cigarette and took several contemplative puffs before she went on.

"Phil was an awfully nice, good-looking, thoughtful, affectionate fellow, Joe," she began—making me hate Phil with her first sentence. "He had a good job with a bank. He met me in the doctor's office where I worked as a nurse then, just the way you met me at Dr. Westmore's. We were attracted to each other right away. We had some dates. And when Phil proposed to me after several months, I accepted."

She looked at me sideways, an earnest look asking understanding. "Phil was a pretty wonderful husband. But basically he was a lazy man, Joe. And I don't think you are. Are you?"

"Lazy!" I said. "I work like a damn dog!" I grinned at her. "Even if my boss says I'm fundamentally a deadbeat."

Marjory protested, "You're not lazy. But Phil, my first husband, definitely was. He had a good brain, really, but he preferred to use it in search of laziness, instead of for constructive work." She paused and took another puff of her cigarette.

"Excuse me for being dense," I said, "but what does that mean? 'In search of laziness?' "

"It was very simple, Joe. Phil had this terrific desire to retire from active work while he was still young, but with a good steady income."

"That's not laziness," I said, "that's the great American dream. What's wrong with that? I often think of it myself."

"Phil thought of it incessantly, that's all. He spent absolute weeks and months after we were married thinking about it. And suddenly one evening he came up with the Big Idea, as he called it, in capital letters—the trick that would make a lifetime of laziness come true."

Marjory paused, evidently remembering that red letter evening with her first husband. "Phil had been going over some old photographs he had—snapshots taken of him and some of his friends in the Korean War. One of them showed a medical corpsman Phil had known in the Army. And that suddenly reminded Phil how this soldier had tricked the Army doctors into giving him a medical discharge from the service. So you see, it wasn't Phil's Big Idea at all,

but that medical corpsman's, all those years ago."

"Listen, darling," I said, rubbing my finger over the satin skin of her inner wrist, "let's leave out the war memoirs and get to *you,* okay?"

She leaned over and kissed me quickly. "I'm there now, Joe. Phil told me he needed *me* to help him work out his Big Idea. I was a doctor's nurse, remember. Phil asked me to beg, borrow or steal a prescription from my boss for some medicine."

"Medicine?" I said. "What medicine?"

"Digitalis," she answered calmly. "Or digicortis is better."

"Oh."

She smiled at me. "And then, after I'd got the medicine, Phil wanted me to give him a certain teeny amount of it every day. Being a nurse, I'm pretty sharp about exact measurements of medicine and all."

"You are also a fine anaesthetist, darling," I said, leaning over and kissing her, "because even when you're confessing to whatever it is you're confessing to, you can strike me absolutely numb with love."

This called for a short interlude of silence and expressed affection. Then I said, "What was he trying to prove with a silly routine like that? Daily doses of whatever you said. Isn't digitalis a heart medicine?"

"Yes. But it wasn't a silly routine, Joe. Far from it. You see, Phil told me he had a lot of insurance, because he had made good money for years before he met me, and had put all his savings into insurance policies of one kind and another. Altogether, the disability payments he would receive from those insurance policies, if he was ever disabled and couldn't work, were very impressive. That's what he explained to me. So he decided to become disabled right away and start collecting all that lovely disability money. That was his Big Idea."

I sat up with a jerk, really appalled now. "You gave him that medicine and it killed him? Is that what you mean?"

"I forged a prescription for the medicine on one of my boss's prescription blanks," she said, looking straight before her like a little girl confessing to eating three pieces of fudge when her mother had allowed her only one. "I got the medicine from a pharmacy. I administered two-tenths of a milligram of it to Phil once a day for two weeks. Then he pretended to have a heart attack."

"Pretended!"

"Yes. He complained of chest pains and everything and called the doctor, who insisted that he have an electrocardiogram tracing made of his heart immediately."

"And the electrocardiogram showed he was dying, I suppose?

As a result of the medicine you'd given him?"

"Oh, no. The cardiogram showed he'd had a massive heart attack, it's true. Only he hadn't. The digicortis I'd been giving him every day affected his heart in such a way as to make the cardiogram *show* a heart condition, that's all. He didn't really *have* one. But the cardiograms—they took a number of them—proved absolutely to the insurance companies that Phil was completely disabled, a cardiac invalid. They began to pay him within a month."

I squeezed her hand to stop her spate of words. "Wait. Wait. You helped Phil to perpetrate a medical fraud, I understand that. But you didn't help to kill him, as far as I can see. How *did* he die?"

"He died of a heart attack."

I groaned.

"A week after his disability payments began," said Marjory, "poor Phil had a *real* coronary and died of it. The worry, the tension, the almost insupportable strain of faking a heart attack yet proving it genuine, of waiting for the insurance companies to approve his disability claims and start paying—all that was just too much for him. He was rather high strung in the first place. Did I tell you that?"

Marjory stared, regarding me with mute misery in her eyes.

"Darling, you'd have had to be a seer to know that beforehand," I said. "No one can reasonably blame you for anything except maybe being a tiny bit dishonest with the insurance companies. And Phil put you up to that. *I* don't blame you, believe me. I love you."

Her voice was a murmur of contrition. "But do you understand, Joe? Do you think you can really and truly forgive me? What makes it worse—I feel guilty about all the money Phil left me. It seems so dishonest, somehow—"

Instead of answering, I kissed her soundly.

You're probably wondering why I've told you all this. It's ancient history, in a way. For Marjory and I have been very happily married for six years now.

But tomorrow is D-Day. Two weeks ago exactly, I finally found myself agreeing with Marjory that it seemed a pity to let my own large insurance policies go completely to waste. Tomorrow I stage my fake heart attack and have that all-important electrocardiogram made.

I'm pretty sure that my heart will prove better able than Phil's to withstand the tension and strain attendant on collecting my first disability payments from the insurance companies.

But I could be mistaken, of course.

So if I *do* have a fatal heart attack in the near future, perhaps this record of my proposal to Marjory will serve as a friendly warning to her next husband.

DAVID McCALLUM

David McCallum — Illya Kuryakin to you — zoomed to fame and stardom in MGM-Arena's fabulous THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. Now, for the first time, Illya stars in this magazine!

By PETER OPPENHEIM

FOR AN UNKNOWN "second banana," David McCallum has done well with the peeling.

The whole TV world has fallen for him.

The young co-star of "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." is now riding high with one of the most talked-about shows on television.

The crowning evidence attesting to his meteoric rise is his Emmy nomination for outstanding achievement in acting. The award is presented by one's peers and co-workers in the business and it is rare for a foreign, unknown actor to be so honored.

"U.N.C.L.E." surprisingly became a "Cinderella Show" in its first year. For four months, McCallum and his U.N.C.L.E. cohorts, star Robert Vaughn and co-star Leo G. Carroll, would arrive at MGM not knowing if the show would last the entire season.

"Then suddenly, about Christmas time, that first year, what we had hoped for finally happened," says McCallum. "The show's far-out reputation began spreading by word of mouth during the holiday vacation. College and high school students were home, and many of them saw 'U.N.C.L.E.' for the first time."

The series, from a modest start, has zoomed to top Neilson rating in the entire crime field.

McCallum himself seems to have become the symbol of much of American youth. "It's really not me," he corrects. "It's Illya. I sus-

The Amazing Saga of the Man Known as ILLYA KURYAKIN

pect this has been the year of the loner. Young people have become essentially loners. Just look at the dance fads—the Frug, Swim, Watusi—a big mob scene, but no one is making contact with anyone else. That's Illya, the loner. He's what I call a "quiet swinger'. No one knows what he does when he goes home at night."

McCallum and Illya have much in common in real life, though the actor shrugs ruefully whenever the subject is broached. He considers his private life inviolate, and in order to make the point unmistakable, he has never allowed his home, or his wife and his three sons to be photographed.

"I think if my private life ever was forced to become public, they'd have to cart me off in a little van. That's my one sure refuge," he maintains.

McCallum's penchant for doing his own stunt work in the series,

not only is adding a dash of grey to producers Norman Felton and David Victor, but the film crew as well. MGM purposefully spent $400 for a wig and stand-in for the many hazardous falls, rope climbings, fights, etc., but McCallum goes right on doing them all himself.

"I can't explain it, but I feel terrible when I see someone else doing these things and pretending its me," he says. "Besides, I've always believed the only way to do something right is to do it yourself."

McCallum's Illya Kuryakin is a complex creature indeed.

As a key agent for U.N.C.L.E. assigned to Solo's section, Illya is somewhat of an enigma. He is clever, extremely adept physically, all in all a good man to ride the river with in a tight spot.

But he is also a loner, a bookworm, a man who likes to keep to himself when the call to danger is over. Like a machine designed to perform one task, he does his job. Like Solo, he doesn't discuss it with others. Illya has worked behind the Iron Curtain (as have many of U.N.C.L.E.'s agents) sometimes with, sometimes without the consent of the authorities. Only too well he knows the rule that all top secret espionage men know: *the devil take the man who gets caught*. For him there is no country, no consul, no haven.

Getting back to the real life David McCallum, one can only wonder what there is about this admittedly shy Scot that makes susceptible, otherwise sensible young ladies either swoon when he appears, or, as in the case of one nightmare day at the Dallas airport, swarm all over him, tearing his clothes and fighting like tigresses to get close enough to kiss him.

"He's just different," one ardent fan has been quoted as saying. "And he never does what you think he's going to do. He looks like he needs a woman to understand him. And it better not be anyone else but me!"

If that isn't hero worship, what is?

McCallum's emergence as a delirium-inspired sex symbol (they call him a "sexy Scot," a description that causes him to moan deeply), has left him little changed from the quiet, self-effacing unknown of a year ago.

"I'm well aware of the fickleness of the TV public toward 'personalities'," he observes. "I haven't worked for fourteen years as an actor, director, scenery-painter and stage manager for nothing. This personality cult thing means absolutely nothing to me. My one wish is to keep a percentage of my fans with me in years to come."

And Scotsman David need not worry—U.N.C.L.E. should keep him busy for years to come.

Watch Robert Vaughn and
David McCallum in

The Man From U.N.C.L.E.

The fastest show in sight!

IN COLOR FRIDAYS NBC-TV

The Mafia takes care of its own, they say. But—who takes care of the Mafia?

One Gun, One Bullet

by THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY

PRECISELY at ten A.M. the headboard of the oversized bed began to breathe forth hifi and the drapes on the windows pulled back upon their electric trolleys. Giuseppe Bartolli, alias Pepe Brown, yawned, swung to the edge of the bed, scratched the mat of iron grey hair upon his still muscular chest, and pulled on silk pajamas that had cost a hundred dollars a pair.

He half turned to consider the young girl lying beside him, looking like a fallen angel in her crown of golden hair. What was her name?—Ingrid? Sigrid? Well, call her four thousand twenty-six. He took two bills from his wallet and laid them on her long blonde hair, laughing cynically when the young girl reached for them, though still in slumber.

She opened her eyes suddenly and lifted a hand to caress his broken nose.

"How did you get that?" she asked sleepily.

The humor washed off his predatory face. His eyes glinted. "Not in college football!" he snapped and got up.

He took a custom made cigarette from a carved jade box and moved into a small adjoining room that served as his private office. He flipped on closed circuit TV and

inspected the outer part of his establishment.

The bookkeeper and auditor were at work in their room. His secretary, Gloria, was a picture of Madison Avenue glamor and efficiency, a carafe of coffee on her desk. Jimmy Finnazzo, his bodyguard and handy man, was watching the maids clean up the sixty-foot living room. Such supervision was highly important to keep the place from being bugged. He scanned the cash cage, where Nick Terranova was readying stacks of

money for bank deposit. It was a pretty good bank today. That trailer truck of highjacked liquor had not been hay.

Satisfied that his minions were at work, Bartolli went into his gym room for five minutes on the electric bicycle, then five minutes in the sunlamp cabinet. After that, he took a needle shower, with sixteen nozzles spraying him.

Like the girl, all of these gadgets had cost money and he was proud of them. They were symbols of the power and affluence and efficiency of the Mafia, and its American offshoot, Cosa Nostra. Forty-six years ago, he had come to America lower than a peasant—a broke and homeless outlaw. Today he could buy and sell mayors and senators and judges. He was a prince of crime and above the law. The Mafia took good care of its own.

But the girl's inquiry about his nose still rankled. It raised the humiliating memory of the day a rockfisted young detective named Clyde Donnelley had met him as he left the court, nol prossed, and smashed him flat in the marble corridor.

"All right, you two-bit junk pusher," Donnelley had rasped. "A crooked fix and your dirty mouthpiece got you off. But I'll see you in hell if it takes me twenty years!"

Bartolli could have broken Donnelley on charges, but he'd have been the laughing stock of the underworld. Since then, the detective had learned to contain his temper. He now had all of the cold calculation of the criminals he pursued, and he was a lieutenant detective, which was big muscle, and he was one man Bartolli couldn't reach. And this was the twentieth year since that day in the corridor.

Bartolli examined his nose in the mirror and cursed the girl for mentioning it. Then he pulled on fresh lounging pajamas, a silk scarf and embroidered dressing gown and passed back into his bedroom. The press of a button caused a bombproof steel door to slide back into the wall and he moved down a long corridor to his sixty-foot living room and out onto a landscaped terrace that overlooked Central Park.

Standing here, the people beneath looked like crawling ants. Sometimes he'd spit down on them with sheer gratification of the heights he'd reached. This was power such as the princes of the Machiavellis had never known.

Watching him from the back, his young bodyguard thought, "Once he wasn't as tough as me. He shot his way up one by one, each guy ahead of him. And what holds him where he is? Six, maybe eight stinking guns like me, and the freelancers he can hire when he doesn't trust us. Just six or eight, and the Cosa Nostra behind him—and they can spit on the whole United States."

The maids had finished with the living room and Jimmy Finnazzo wheeled out breakfast with the early addition of the evening paper. Bartolli snapped out his napkin as his bodyguard poured his coffee.

"Any messages of importance?"

"Don't you want to eat first, boss?"

Bartolli eyed him. "When you pull that, there's something wrong."

"Well, you had one message. From Detective Lieutenant Donnelley."

Bartolli congealed. He muttered a filthy epithet of hatred. "What did that bastard want?"

"He said to tell you that it hadn't taken quite twenty years. He called on the relay phone."

"Where in hell did he get the number?" Bartolli snarled, eyes narrowed.

The relay phone had been wired through at great expense from an innocuous florist's shop, four blocks distance. Supposedly, the relay wire had been foolproof against trace. Only five people in the city, and Jimmy Finnazzo and himself, knew that number connected here.

"He's sweated somebody and made them sing!" Bartolli growled.

"The girl may have known," Finnazzo suggested. "The one who —uh—ran away."

Bartolli's mouth thinned to a wire slit. "She's dead. If she was a stool, we can't find out now! What did that lousy rat want except to play smart?"

Jimmy Finnazzo nodded nervously at the folded paper. "I guess it's in there. He said you'd want to see it."

Bartolli snapped open the paper and his eyes bulged. The crime headlines fought with each other for space. The Italian police had raided a heroin finishing plant in Palermo. Simultaneously, they had arrested ten Mafia big guns throughout Italy. They were still looking for four additional ones suspected of being in the U.S. and had requested an FBI search.

Bartolli happened to know that two of the wanted men were in the United States, another in Cuba, the fourth in Mexiço. They were handling a million dollar smuggling deal, and their trail, if the FBI picked any of them up, would lead right to him.

To make things worse, a dead con had sung before he was liquidated. He'd left tapes and affidavits with a newspaper, and those tapes had definitely identified two underworld agents in the police and Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Even if they beat the rap of a dead man's evidence, it would knock hell out of the smuggling operation. The D.A. would not hesitate to pressure them, and neither would Lieutenant Donnelley. They'd probably have to make a deal, and that deal would be to

sing, and the song they'd sing would be of Bartolli.

He looked up, sweating. He was no cool and haughty prince now. He looked like a cornered animal. His jaws were ashen, there was spittle on his bloodless lips. The big vein pounded a purple line upon his temple.

"Get my mouthpiece and that weasel wardheeler over here right away," he croaked at Finnazzo. "Get word to the Big Five we'll have to meet here this afternoon. Don't phone 'em. That bastard will have every phone we've got tapped."

He cursed and spit. "I should have dumped him twenty years ago!"

"Maybe it's not too late," Finnazzo suggested.

"The hell it isn't! If he called to crow, he's got the muscle somewhere."

"Maybe he's trying to scare you into making a play."

"Yeah? With that setup?" Bartolli hurled the newspaper onto the terrace. "All those things just didn't happen to happen. They've got Interpol in this and they're all going to hit at once."

He sat breathing hard and rubber lipped, staring at the newspaper as if it were a snake. "It was Donnelley," he muttered. "That damned dirty louse cop engineered this. Get me the executioner—I'll fix him yet!"

Suddenly his attention centered on Jimmy Finnazzo and he screamed with rage, "What are you still doing here when I've told you what to do?"

Finnazzo turned quickly toward the door, ticking off his fingers as he muttered, "Kassel, his mouthpiece. Kenneally, the political fixer. Goetz, the torpedo. Olivieri, Lucomo, Morris, Morrissey, and Martel, the syndicate."

Funny, Finnazzo thought, how damn few men it took to run a big operation once you had the muscle and the money. Here were eight men running a fifty million dollar racket. Counting the men from Italy and errand boys like himself, there weren't more than a hundred in the mob. How many U.S. corporations that size did that kind of business—ten million cool profit a year?

Finnazzo crossed the ornate lobby of the hotel apartment. There was a new mail clerk on the desk, a new girl at the cigarette stand, a new doorman. There'd be others among service employees. He stopped at the newsstand to give the new girl the once over and the smell of police came off of her like cheap perfume.

He left the change and made a wisecrack, but his mouth hardened. There were enough police around here for a parade, and the boss owned fifteen per cent of this building!

For a moment, Finnazzo hesitated, not used to the necessity for

decision. Should he go back and tell the boss they might be setting up a raid? But no, they couldn't grab the boss this quick. They couldn't grab him until they'd grabbed others, and the concrete evidence of a smuggling pickup or knocking off a cutting plant. He'd get over to Kassel and provide his own insurance too against arrest while he had the chance.

JIMMY FINNAZZO got into the parked Mercedes and drove with no effort to throw off a police tail. Let 'em see the boss had reached Kassel. The police thought twice about manhandling one of his clients.

He beat the police into the lobby of Kassel's building. The mob had a payroll contact at the newsstand. Picking up late editions, he told the newsman, "Phone Pete at the garage to bring down the black Caddy and park it on the side street."

The man counted out his change and nodded. One of the police came into the lobby as he strolled toward the elevators and took position beside a post.

Kassel already knew all about the case. He said, "Tell your boss they picked up Orlando. Lucomo called me to get him sprung, but your boss is all the heat I can hold. Right now, he's the hottest thing in America. His hair is singing."

"The boss wants you over to his apartment," Finnazzo said.

Kassel gave him a fish-eyed stare and a chopped laugh. "What's he want to do, tell the police and FBI his whole business? That place is bugged like Symphony Hall."

"Like hell," Finnazzo bridled. "You couldn't get a mike the size of a dime in there without me knowing."

Kassel laughed again. "Your walls and ceiling are just one big ear, chump. For a fish the size of Bartolli, they use the Dick Tracy equipment. Tell him to come over here, but keep away from any place of business and don't let any stranger at all into the apartment. They may have a body warrant."

Jimmy Finnazzo lit a cigarette and exhaled slowly. "This bad trouble?"

"We can beat 'em in court, but right now with the FBI on things and all this publicity, it's hot. It's too late for the boss to skip jurisdiction. He couldn't sneak it even as a corpse."

"How about me?" Finnazzo asked.

The lawyer looked at him with new appraisal. "You going to take a powder?"

"No. I mean, who takes care of me if I get in trouble?"

Kassel gave that speculative thought.

"You're small fry, Jimmy," he said finally. "But you could grow big pretty fast the way this is running, if you don't try to get too big. Just don't get too hungry. You've

got my home phone. Call me personal if they grab you."

Finnazzo nodded and got up. He said, "The boss wants to see Kenneally, too."

Kassel shrugged. "That's up to Kenneally, but I doubt if you'll find him in town. He's too close to City Hall to take a chance on meeting right now."

Finnazzo nodded again and left, walking around to the passenger elevators and spotting no detective waiting. So he was waiting in the lobby, simply a routine shadow job.

Jimmy Finnazzo went around to the service elevator and got quick service to the basement for a sawbuck. Another ten at the check door got him out into the loading alley. His exit would be reported, but it wouldn't matter. This gave him the chance to pick up the Caddy while the cops were watching the Mercedes and the front door.

He had to make choices and decisions now. It wouldn't be long before Donnelley's boys would realize he'd given them the slip and put out a general call. For practical purposes, Goetz, the executioner, was the hottest of those he had to contact, so he drove up Broadway to find Goetz.

He caught him having breakfast in the third delicatessen he stopped at.

Goetz didn't even glance up. From the side of his mouth, he said, "Get away from me. I don't know you, Jimmy."

"The boss has a contract for you. A big one," Finnazzo said in the same flat tone.

"I'm on call," Goetz said, but added, "How big?"

"Big big."

Goetz chewed a chunk of waffle. "I'll stop by," he muttered. His weasel face held a cryptic look.

"The lobby's full of cops," Finnazzo said.

Goetz jerked his head at the paper. "What else? I've seen cops before. They've got nothing on me."

Jimmy Finnazzo moved on past the table, ordering coffee at the counter, which he left half untouched.

He drove over to Kenneally's club and was greeted by an anguished, "For cripe's sake, get lost fast, willya? He ain't here, he ain't in town and he can't be reached by phone."

"The boss won't like that," Finnazzo said.

"No?" the political stooge started to snarl, then thought better of it. "Well, tell him my boss is doing what he can, but he don't want to be in contact."

Jimmy Finnazzo nodded and moved back down the long flight of stairs. A passing prowl car eyed him as he moved toward his car. Their interest did not look as if there'd been an alert yet. He thought of the remaining things he had to do and felt the growing ten-

sion of decision. Finally, he walked to the corner phone and called his boss.

Bartolli yelled, "What in hell—"

"Listen," Finnazzo cut in recklessly, "Kassel says for you to come to his office. The other man left word he knows but doesn't want to talk right now. You want me to do the rest of the business or come back now?"

"Damn it, I told you what to do!" Bartolli barked savagely.

"Our lobby's hot—" Finnazzo ventured.

"Damn the lobby!" Bartolli exploded. Then he rasped, "No, wait. Tell the boys we'll meet at the store. The usual time." He banged up. Bartolli seldom banged the phone even in anger. His nerves were singing.

Finnazzo drove to Brooklyn, to Olivieri's labor office. The gang boss was feverishly supervising the gathering of papers to be destroyed. "What the hell's wrong with Pepe, wanting a meeting now?" he rasped.

"You know the boss," Finnazzo said. "Always ready for the punch."

"Yeah, he was sure ready!" the gangster snorted. He looked speculative. "How's he taking it?"

"He knows what he's doing," Finnazzo said. "He's got reason to be a little nervous with Donnelley in this."

"That old vendetta? He should have dumped that lousy cop. So

he wants to meet at the supermarket. All right, I've got the message."

JIMMY FINNAZZO made the rounds of Morris, Morrissey and Martel. He had an idea that Martel already knew he was coming. Martel took time to give him a drink and ask details about the apartment stakeout. He was an enormous man who chewed up expensive cigars the way a crocodile would chew a baby. He had started in Murder Inc. and he still liked the human torch method of execution.

Finally the mobster said just what Olivieri had said, "How's he taking it?"

"He's hot but not on the spot,

his mouthpiece says. It's mostly the publicity."

"That's enough! You can always get another trial but you can't get another million dollar operation just for asking for it. We don't even know if we can kill this deal before the stuff's on its way here. He still got communication with Mexico and Cuba?"

"You'll have to ask him," Finnazzo said. "You boys aren't nervous, are you?"

"Yeah, I'm good and nervous," Olivieri growled. "Pepe's hot as hell with five different police out gunning for him and a personal vendetta with the louse who must have cooked up the United States end of this. Except that I've a big piece of change advanced on this, I wouldn't even want to know your boss until this cools off."

"So what do I tell him?" Finnazzo grunted.

"Tell him you delivered the message. Now get out. I've got some calls to make."

Jimmy Finnazzo moved out past Olivieri's torpedoes. They nodded, but he felt a coolness that was far from the usual camaraderie. It was gang neighborhood where he was known, and there was a decided lack of enthusiasm from acquaintances he saw on the street.

He had to drive back to the city's Little Italy now to reach Lucomo, and he drove back the long way through the neighborhoods he had just visited. There was a noticeable emptiness of hangouts. The tension of a quiet before the storm was like a smell from the tougher streets.

He saw new faces that hadn't been around when he drove over. Some of them were Donnelley's top men. The others were roaming detectives—watching, waiting. It didn't look like a stakeout for a pinch, but it did look like a blanketing of the gang haunts.

What were the cops trying to do—prevent a meeting or catch the whole bunch together? Or just making muscles—putting on heat to give the boys the jitters? It looked like a scare game and obvious, but it might work.

It would set every gang chief in the syndicate jittery and wondering who had sung what—and wondering if somebody was trying to finger him. There was fear a plenty but damned little trust or loyalty in the Mafia.

Finnazzo crossed by the bridge. He could lose himself better in truck traffic than in the tunnel, where a car could be checked through by TV. Parking the Caddie, he walked through Little Italy to a vegetable stand, where a taxi was parked amidst a clutter of empty boxes along the curb. As he reached the stand, Goetz, the Dutchman, came out toward the cab, giving Finnazzo a fast double take. Goetz hesitated, then stopped to light a cigarette.

"You seen my boss yet?" Finnazzo mouthed as he came up.

"No, Jimmy. I'm still on call," Goetz said. "I'll try to make it tonight or tomorrow." The killer-for-hire puffed, exhaled a stream of smoke and got into the waiting cab.

Finnazzo picked up a nectarine and thoughtfully watched the cab driver off. Goetz was stalling. A killer didn't stall on arranging a big contract. A big one would run ten, fifteen, maybe twenty grand. An executioner would want that contract in his pocket. He'd also want to know who he was going to hit, just in case there was conflict in whatever he was doing for Lucomo.

It could be that the syndicate meant to sacrifice the big boss to save their own skins.

Finnazzo turned into the store, picked out half a dozen nectarines, and at a nod from the fruit man, passed into the rear of the store and through a narrow door into the hallway of the adjoining building.

He climbed a rickety flight of stairs and gave a tattoo on the metal sheathed door of an old speakeasy. He was examined through a peephole, admitted into a hall where two goons frisked him before passing him through, first to one room filled with smoke, and then through another steel door to Lucomo's private office.

Lucomo sat like a big lethal toad behind a desk. "You tell Pepe I don't like his mouthpiece refusing to act for Orlando," he growled. "Looks like somebody maybe made a deal to toss him to the D.A."

"Kassel did that on his own," Finnazzo said. "He was scared the newspapers would make a connection of it if he handled him."

"So the papers don't know there's a connection?" Lucomo snorted.

Jimmy Finnazzo shrugged. "You can tell the boss yourself. He wants a meeting at the store, at four o'clock."

Lucomo leaned back and chewed on his cigar and studied Finnazzo with his toadlike eyes. "That would make it nice and easy for the police to grab us all at once. Hunh?"

"He can't talk on the phone, he can't meet you in public. This may be his last chance to decide what to do," Jimmy Finnazzo said. "The cops don't know that spot."

"Last chance, all right. That Donnelley knows too much. Word I get is that he knew a lot before he picked up Orlando."

Finnazzo made a gesture. "I'm just the messenger."

Lucomo chewed his cigar across his face. "Okay. You've messaged."

Then, as Jimmy Finnazzo started to leave, he said, "Wait."

He studied Finnazzo with his shrewd, emotionless eyes. Then he

said, "No. You'd goof. You're still a slob. Breeze."

Finnazzo left by the same route he'd come. We wondered what had been on Lucomo's mind. Maybe the same thing he was holding Goetz on call for? It was a scarey thought. If they were set to blast the boss, he'd better get the word to him. But then he thought, why? better that he take care of himself—while there still was time.

JIMMY FINNAZZO parked his car at a Lucomo garage, stopped at Whitey's for veal scallopini, and borrowed a panel truck to drive to the supermarket. The last of the day's delivery trucks had pulled out of the loading port. The checker was just closing the double steel doors.

"Don't lock up," Finnazzo ordered. "We're pulling out some overstock tonight."

The man nodded, knowing Finnazzo only as someone who had authority, and passed him through.

Jimmy Finnazzo turned through the cluttered storage area to a cement blockhouse in the center. Supposedly, it was a no longer used refrigeration room. Actually, it was one of the syndicate meeting rooms, and his job now was to inspect it carefully for hidden microphones and boobies. He flipped on the air conditioning and inspected it inch by inch.

After that he inspected the phone and then the electric controls of two escape hatches, a steel plate in the ceiling giving access to the building's roof, and a cement trap door in the floor that gave access to the cellar.

The place was clean and everything was in working order. He rinsed glasses at a sink, and set out liquor, cigars and ashtrays from a cabinet. At twenty to four, he turned to the delivery door and told the check guard he could beat it. Left alone in the silence of the storeroom, he unlocked what looked like a fuse box and took out an automatic, an armpit harness and a sawed off shotgun.

At five after four, he paced the loading platform nervously. It was a matter of pride with the bosses to be a few minutes late, but their goons usually scouted out the whole area at least fifteen minutes before the bosses arrived. At four thirteen, Binks Hammond came through from the store side. Hammond was one of the boss's muscle men who doubled as driver when Jimmy Finnazzo was not on hand.

"The boss is in the store," Binks grunted. "Everything clear?"

"Clear as mud," Finnazzo snapped. "You better stand guard by the buzzer at the front door. If you see cops or hoods, don't wait to signal."

"Yeah? What's wrong."

"Something smelly. But tell the boss it's all clear now."

Hammond vanished back through the storeroom. Shortly,

Giuseppe Bartolli appeared, expensively dressed and moving with executive arrogance, an attache case under his arm. Finnazzo closed and bolted the back door and went to admit him through the soundproof refrigerator door of the blockhouse.

Bartolli stopped dead in midstride, his face mottling with anger as he stared into the empty room.

"What in hell did you tell them?" he snarled.

"The usual time. Four o'clock."

"Did they act funny, any of 'em —Lucomo especial?"

"Not particularly. A little twitchy maybe, but their neighborhoods were getting heavy with cops."

"That bastard Donnelley!" Bartolli swore. "He's pulling something."

He banged his attache case on the meeting table. He poured a stiff drink and downed it at a gulp.

"Call the message service," he ordered.

Finnazzo dialed the number and gave the phony name they used for messages. There were none. By itself, that was incredible.

Bartolli was ashen with mixed fury and fear. "Call their lawyers." See if anybody's been picked up," he said hoarsely.

Jimmy Finnazzo phoned four different lawyers who represented them in the lesser criminal procedures such as bail, habeas corpus, and contact with top mouthpiece when needed. None knew of any particular trouble in the past several hours. Orlando had already been sprung, they conveyed in gambling code. At this point it looked as if everything might simmer down to sensational news reports and little else.

"Like hell! Those dumb bastards!" Bartolli yelled hoarsely. "Lucomo, Martel, the others too. Don't they know this is the last chance we may get to meet? It took me over an hour to throw off a police tail."

He lighted a cigar and stalked the room muttering stormily and spreading a sheet of smoke. He sent Finnazzo out to case the alley and the adjoining street, then the store itself and that street. There was no sign of either cops or mobsters or any of their goons. He had him phone various contact numbers. None of the syndicate members had been seen around since earlier afternoon. They'd left no messages.

At ten past five, Bartolli crouched in a chair and drank from a bottle without pouring. He had chewed through two cigars. Frayed particles had pasted into the vertical snarl lines that grew deeper around his mouth. He was roaring but fear was rising in his eyes.

"Donnelley couldn't have pulled all this alone," he rasped. "Those lousy mobsters made a deal. They've sold me out. They're

going to leave me hold the bag alone!"

Bartolli smashed the bottle on the table. "I can beat them and without going outside this fort! I've got enough evidence right in that attache case to fry them all!"

He was alternately roaring and whispering, jumping from one wild possibility to another. Even Jimmy Finnazzo could see that. The others couldn't sell him out without implicating themselves. And they wouldn't do that until the D.A. was breathing ten years down their necks. But they might think he was pulling a double cross to get them out of the picture and take over the whole racket, and Donnelley was not above putting out such rumors. That would give his detective blanket a more serious color.

It would look like a dragnet ready to whip tight at some particular moment, such as catching all of the gang chiefs together at this meeting. So they had holed up until they could learn exactly what and how much Donnelley really knew. It was a standoff, but Bartolli was taking it for a fix.

That would also account for the Dutchman's stall. Goetz was on call, all right. He was on standby to hit the boss if the others decided it was necessary.

BUT YOU DIDN'T tell Giuseppe Bartolli that a cop had outsmarted him, that he'd lost his nerve and was thinking wild. Not if you wanted to live, you didn't.

Bartolli swilled down another drink and sat there breathing in huge whistling gasps.

"The lice," he muttered thickly. "They didn't have the guts to face me because I'd read 'em. So they've sold out to that rat cop and cut out of the picture."

He suddenly erupted in violent fury. "I'll fix them all and that rat cop too! Get that top punk at the FBI," he yelled.

Jimmy Finnazzo felt himself go cold and moist. This kind of cross was the beginning of the end, either way the cards fell. Bartolli might fix the mob, but others would hit him for it, and anyone close to his business. But the passport out of trouble lay right there on the table in that attache case.

Finnazzo stood beside his boss, dialing the FBI phone, feeling his back go taut as wire. He asked for the agent by name and said it was Pepe Brown calling.

There was a touch of excitement in the operator's voice as he said, "Just a minute."

"They're getting him," Finnazzo said. He handed the phone to his boss. He knew exactly what that "just a minute" meant. The agent was out of the office, probably up at their own hotel. The FBI switchboard would have to run through another call for a connection.

Bartolli chewed his cigar impa-

tiently, his fist white with tension around the phone. Jimmy Finnazzo stepped away from the table to move around him. Bartolli didn't even notice until he felt the cold muzzle of the gun. He never even heard the shot reverberate from the cement walls of the enclosed room.

Finnazzo leaned over his sprawled figure and clicked off the phone connection. Then he wiped off fingerprints and put Bartolli's relaxing hand back upon the instrument. His own prints were all over the room, of course, but with no provable motive and no weapon, the D.A. would have a hard time making a case against Kassel's defense.

"One gun, one shot," he laughed nervously. He opened the trap door to the roof and left it open. It meant nothing, but Kassel would make it an additional point of confusion. He reached Bartolli's heavy wallet, the one with the five hundred and thousand dollar banknotes he carried for emergency.

He wiped the gun clean of fingerprints, picked up the attache case and went back to the loading platform to toss them on the seat of the panel truck. Then he thought of Hammond. No sense letting him go haywire before the dumb cluck got wise that he was no longer employed.

He passed back through the storeroom and into the store and

found Hammond at his signal post. "Boss wants us to get the cars out of the neighborhood fast," he said. "He'll take a cab."

"The big boys show up?" Hammond asked curiously.

"He's got a contact in there now," Finnazzo said.

He watched the goon head for the car in front. He returned to the panel truck and took time to light a cigarette. His biggest problem now would be to dispose of the murder weapon. He thought of what Lucomo had almost said, and grinned. He'd make his explanation and deal with the Big Five for the contents of that attache case, and they'd certainly bless him.

And he'd still have time to run through Bartolli's private files at the apartment and sneak out what he wanted before the police or FBI got wise and had an excuse to come after him.

He had his hand on the ignition when a relentless, mocking voice came from immediately behind him. "Well, well, Jimmy boy, leaving the boss all to his lonesome?"

In his mind's eye, Finnazzo caught the picture. There was a half partition behind the seat and Donnelley had crouched behind it. The boss never had lost him; he'd been tailed and this smart cop had just waited for the breaks.

"Pepe left by the front door. Hammond's driving him," Jimmy Finnazzo blurted in panic.

"Jimmy boy, you shouldn't lie," Donnelley said. "We've got a walkie talkie staked out in front. Mr. Pepe Brown-Giuseppe Bartolli is still inside. Blown to hell and gone, I hope—but that is strictly unofficial. The Mafia takes good care of its own, doesn't it, Jimmy boy?

"The Mafia big boys are bad enough," he added. "But you small time hangers-on are worse. Big Pepe at least had loyalty to you rats. He was stupid enough to think he could trust you. That was his mistake. And you—your mistake was in thinking you could climb into a pair of brogans that were a lot too big for you, dirty though they were."

He grinned bleakly, and it somehow was worse than a gang death sentence.

A wild retching sound ripped from Finnazzo's throat. Recklessly, he threw himself and grabbed a gun off the seat and twisted to fire in back of him.

Donnelley laughed softly as the hammer clicked on empty. "I took the trouble to remove the remaining shells while you were inside getting rid of Hammond," he said. "But I'm obliged for putting your prints back upon the murder weapon. Now, Jimmy boy, let's go back and see how your boss's health is."

The door wrenched open and handcuffs clicked upon Jimmy Finnazzo's wrist.

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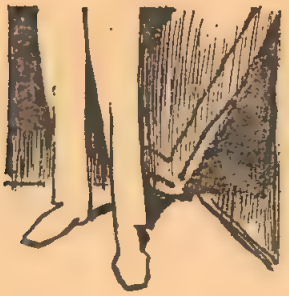
Only Clara Smith could have told why
she had murdered a complete stranger.
And she lay crushed under a subway train!

"BUT YOU DON'T KNOW ME!"

by STEVE APRIL



ON THE AFTERNOON she was murdered, Mrs. Eva Morris left her part-time bookkeeping job at the Lunigan Meat Company at four, as usual. By four fifteen she was standing on a subway station platform. Mrs. Morris lived nearby and always walked to the job if the weather was good, but at sixty-one she was far too tired at the end of the day to walk home.

As a train came into the station Mrs. Morris felt something at her back. Turning, she saw a thin blonde girl of about thirteen, in jeans and white blouse, staring at her with large, intense, blue eyes. The young girl held a shoe box in her right hand, with the handle and trigger of a homemade zip-gun sticking out of the box underside. The box end was open and the gun inside aimed at Mrs. Morris' head.

For a split second, as the subway roared into the station, Mrs. Morris and the girl stared at each other. Then the woman shrilled, *"But you don't know me!"* her thin voice louder than the approaching train. Several men and women waiting for the train turned to look at the two.

There was the orange gun blast; blood appeared over Mrs. Morris' thick nose, below her eyeglasses, as she crumpled. The paper box slowly started to burn and the now wide-eyed girl dropped it with a small cry.

As she started for the exit several men ran at her. The girl sidestepped, trying to outflank the ap-

proaching men as she raced along the edge of the platform. A portly man with sandy-yellow hair and a heavy, tabacco-stained moustache, reached for the girl as the others closed in on her.

The train braked to a screaming stop and then a sudden silence blanketed the entire station. The horrified people gazed from the dead Mrs. Morris to the crushed girl under the heavy train wheels, at the thin, pale arm flung out from under the train as if in an abstract, pleading gesture.

DETECTIVE Bob Straw of the Homicide Bureau was a heavyset man in his fifties with a sour face under a grey crewcut. On first seeing him, if asked to guess his occupation, you probably would say Straw was a head clerk, or possibly an assistant manager of a supermarket.

The resigned look could well be the result of all the years of hearing the same old jokes about his name: "Here comes the last straw." Or, "Are you the straw that broke the camel's back?" But any such impression would vanish when Bob Straw talked—his voice was harsh, cold, cruel and tough.

Now, sitting in the air conditioned detective squad room of this suburban precinct, thinking it was the first modern station house he'd ever seen in the city, Detective Straw held the various reports of the shooting in his pudgy hands and listened to Lieutenant Harry Mancino.

The lieutenant was about the same age as Straw but looked like a dick: tall and lean, big hands and compact shoulders, sharply dressed.

He said, "We can close the case, Straw. As you saw from the reports, the deceased never knew this dizzy kid, this Clara Smith. Mrs. Morris was the widow of a butcher, had kept the books in his store until he died about nine years ago. She had no kids or family, lived alone in a one room apartment. She'd been keeping the books for the Lunigan Meat Company from ten to four for the last four years.

"As for Clara Smith, she lived with her hard working mother way over on the other side of town. Mama says Clara was a wild kid, always out of the house. Papa died in a mental institution. Most likely the kid was a mental weirdie. She's dead, so that wraps up the case. Just another example of our nutty teenagers, shooting a total stranger. Damn, you never know what these jerky kids of today will do. Nobody is safe from them."

Straw nodded his big head, then said curtly, "I'm not calling the case closed, Lieutenant."

"Oh come on, a dozen people saw the girl shoot Mrs. Morris, then saw the kid fall under the train! What more can we do?"

"I'm bothered. In the second or

two before the old lady was shot, after she'd seen the gun in the shoe box, it's odd that she shouted, *'But you don't know me!'* On seeing anybody pointing a gun at her, especially a strange kid, Mrs. Morris should have screamed for help, or merely screamed."

Lieutenant Mancino groaned silently. He knew Straw was a top homicide man, but this was obviously an open and shut case. He said, "In a moment like that, who can say what a person will shout? Mrs. Morris saw an absolute stranger aiming a gun at her, so naturally she thought the kid had mistaken her for somebody else. That's all."

"Yeah, that's what she must have thought. But she said, *'But you don't know me!'* I have a hunch Mrs. Morris expected somebody to get her but was astonished at it being a kid. Another thing, according to this talk one of your men had with Mrs. Morris' neighbor, the old lady had mentioned that she expected to come into 'some money' soon and was going to travel to Israel. Could she have been shaking somebody down?"

"Stop it, Straw. Mrs. Morris had two hundred ninety-four dollars in a savings account, a couple of U.S. Bonds, received one hundred dollars monthly from a small policy her husband had left her. Her take home pay from the meat company was forty-six dollars and seventy-eight cents. She was a quiet type, watched TV a lot, only left her apartment on Saturdays to go to the temple. Does that sound like a shakedown artist? The money she expected was her Social Security. She would have been sixty-two in a few weeks, had already applied for Social Security."

"Maybe. But that would have amounted to about one hundred twenty dollars monthly, hardly traveling money," Straw said sullenly.

Mancino punched the air with his left hand. "She'd still be getting the little insurance money, meaning she'd have about fifty bucks a week, tax-free. Straw, why make a big deal out of this?"

"I don't know. But I still think she should have yelled for help. It's just possible this wasn't any crazy killing but a deliberate murder. Straw got to his feet. "I want to dig into this for a day or so."

Mancino shrugged. "Okay, you're the homicide expert. But I have a busy house here and I think you're wasting time over nothing."

"Maybe. I'll dig on my own. I'll be in touch."

It was seven when Straw left the precinct house and drove to the Lunigan Meat Company. This was a double store on the ground floor of a tenement, with the apartment above used as an office. There was a light in the office and Mr. Sam Lunigan was checking orders.

He was a thickly built man in his early forties with a boyish face. He explained to Straw, "I supply meat to restaurants and a couple of hotels. This is a highly competitive business, keeps me on my toes all the time. Downstairs I have my freezers, meat grinders. I have one butcher and two drivers working for me, help with the butchering myself. My wife used to keep the books but when we had our second kid, I advertised for a part-time bookkeeper. Eva Morris answered the ad and was the right person: she lived near here, knew the business from working with her husband. My God, I still can't believe the sweet old woman is dead. That Smith kid, why would anybody shoot a total stranger?"

"Did Mrs. Morris seem worried, upset, lately?"

"Eva? Quiet as a mouse. You know how it is, all my employes take home a package of bacon now and then, a couple of chops or a pickled tongue. But not Eva. She'd be here at ten, regular as a clock, do her work and leave at four. She was more or less on her own up here, but she never goofed off. Except for phoning down to the shop, the men rarely saw or heard her. Eva was my right hand, honest as they come."

"Did you know she was going to leave here soon?"

"Eva? Leave?" Lunigan looked startled. Then he shook his dark head. "Oh, you mean this Social Security bit. She wasn't leaving." He hesitated. "Uh—Officer, can I tell you something off the record?"

"Not if it concerns Mrs. Morris."

"It does, in a way. I mean, we had decided I'd pay her out of petty cash. In that way there wouldn't be any record and she could collect her Social Security. I suppose, technically, that would have been breaking the law, but I wanted to help the old girl out." Lunigan sighed. "Good bookkeepers are hard to find."

"Did she ever tell you she was going to travel, visit Israel?" Straw asked.

"Sure. It was her dream. She was a religious woman. But it was only a dream."

"We found travel circulars in her apartment."

"Yeah, Eva was always reading 'em. She was going to bank her Social Security checks for a few years, have enough to spend a summer abroad."

Straw rubbed his double chin. "This Smith girl, you ever see her hanging around here?"

"The papers didn't have a picture of her, I don't even know what she looked like. But Eva never had any visitors. Man, I'm telling you, kids these days! I—"

Straw stood up. "What's the best time to talk to your employees?"

"In the morning. We make up the orders, then the drivers take off before eleven. Say, do you think this kid knew Eva? I mean, she

was out to gun the old lady down?"

"Maybe."

"If you'd known Eva, you'd know that was impossible. She didn't have a mean thought or—"

"I'll be back in the morning."

Mrs. Wanda Smith lived in a new low income housing project, a fifty minute subway ride from the meat company, on the other side of the city. The apartment was spotless and cheaply furnished. Mrs. Smith was a skinny, work-worn little woman, looking far older than thirty-five. She was asleep, a doctor had given her a pill—but her next door neighbor, a plump Negro woman, was sitting in the living room.

She said, "It's a rotten shame. Wanda worked hard as a dress operator and to have something like this happen to her only kid. And no relatives, nobody to be with her in this time of sorrow. It ain't right. You slave for your baby, follow the good life and the rug is pulled out from under you."

"Did you know Clara?" Straw asked, voice grim.

"Of course I knew her. Smart as a whip, that girl was."

"I understand she was wild. Boy trouble?" Straw asked.

"Oh no, none of that boy stuff for Clara. She was a thin little thing, you know, not developed for her age. Now I have a twelve year old girl and Lord, she has a bust bigger than mine. I have to keep a strict eye on that child, or—"

"Was Clara wild?" Straw cut in, his harsh voice like a slap in the otherwise silent room.

The woman rubbed her brown hands together. "I wouldn't say Clara was wild. You see how it was; Wanda didn't get home until after six at night. Most times Clara would be in the house by then, too. But it wasn't any secret that she rode the subways a lot. School kids get passes. Right from school Clara would get on the subway and ride all over the city. Like she was hunting for something. She'd tell my girl how she'd been here and there, always traveling, day after day. But Clara was never in any trouble."

"Did you know Mr. Smith?"

"No. He was already dead when they moved in here."

"Did he die in a mental institution?"

"That's what I hear and—Oh, I see what you're getting at. Well, Wanda told me several times about him. He wasn't a loony, he was a lush. I guess drinking is a kind of craziness."

"How long ago did he die?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe five years ago. A woman with a drunken husband, that's a hard cross to carry."

Straw glanced around the neat room. "Is there a picture of Clara here?"

"Well, there's some snaps they took at the amusement park last summer. Reporters wanted a picture but Wanda told them to get

out. I guess it's okay if I give you one. You won't give it to the papers, now?"

"No, of course not." A moment later, studying a snapshot of an unsmiling thin girl in a bathing suit, the face long and bony, Straw said, "She doesn't look like a happy kid."

"You might call Clara moody. But if you have any kids you know how it is. Today they expect the world on a silver platter. Wanda always tried her best, had Clara dressed neatly, gave her spending money. Many a night Wanda would be up late, sewing clothes for Clara. Of course, by the time Wanda came home and made supper, she was beat, most times went to her bed. Maybe Clara was lonely but on weekends they did the washing and cooking together, might go to a movie. Sometimes, on Sundays, Clara would spend her candy money riding the subways. Always on the go, that girl was."

"Have you any idea where she got the zip-gun from?" Straw asked, heading for the door.

"No, sir, no idea at all. That shocked me. There are some kid gangs around here. Not that we've had any trouble—knock wood. But Clara never bothered with them. Even if she had wanted to, she never had the time, what with her riding the subways so much."

"Will Mrs. Smith be home tomorrow?"

"Of course. The doc told her to stay in bed for a few days, until the funeral."

"I'll be back."

It was after eleven when Straw reached his own apartment, but his wife had supper waiting. For the first time since he left the apartment, Straw relaxed, even smiled. They watched TV for awhile and went to bed a little after midnight. At six Straw shaved and showered, had a good breakfast and kissed his wife. He phoned Lieutenant Mancino for the names and addresses of the people who'd witnessed the subway shooting.

Mancino read the list over the phone, added, "We were able to trace the box holding the gun. Came from some sandals Clara Smith's mother bought her a week ago. The slug was a twenty-two long. No prints on the zip-gun. It had never been used before. The one shot wrecked it. How are you coming, Straw?"

"Still digging. I'll be in touch."

Mrs. Susan Bond was a petite young redhead on the cute side. She told Straw, "I am—was Clara's home teacher. In junior high school the students have different teachers for the various classes, but they start in their home class. Frankly, I refuse to believe Clara did this terrible thing."

"Why?" Straw asked coldly.

Mrs. Bond spread tiny hands on her desk. "Clara was a very intelligent girl, but also—well, a kind of

hustler. During her lunch period she'd do reports and homework for the other students, for a dime, or for candy.

"School work came easily for her and I think she helped the others not so much for money, rather it gave her a big-shot feeling. Her own grades weren't the highest, but that was only because she never studied much. With a little application Clara could have been our top student."

"Was she neurotic?"

"Oh no. Clara was always alert and cheerful. In fact, for the past few weeks she seemed especially gay."

"Was she friendly with the other students?"

"No, not exactly. Clara was always a loner and—Wait, I think she was friendly with a boy, not romance or anything like that. Charles Parks, a younger boy in the seventh grade."

Charlie Parks was a gangling twelve-year-old, obviously nervous. Talking to a police officer and Straw's tough voice didn't help. "I wasn't going steady with Clara. She was just helping me with history. I can't seem to get history in my head, but Clara—ask her any date and she'd snap out the answer like a cram book. I used to give her candy and stuff for helping me but she'd help me even if I was broke."

"Did you give her the zip-gun?"

"No sir! I don't fool with guns or rough stuff. I don't know where she got that from. I only saw Clara during lunch periods sometimes. That's all. She never hung around when school was over."

Straw handed the boy a card. "Charlie, that's my name and phone number. If you think of anything else to tell me, phone me and leave your name. Do you have a phone at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. If I'm not in, leave your phone number and I'll call you. I think we both want to help Clara."

"Help—? Hey, you mean she didn't do the shooting, like the papers said?"

"Perhaps somebody made her do it."

As Straw left the empty classroom he'd been using as an office, Charlie ran to the door. "Say, officer, there is something I forgot. The last few weeks Clara was very happy and excited. Once, when I asked how come she was so gay, she said, 'I've found him.' "

"Him? A boy friend?"

"Not really. But Clara was always carrying around this beat-up old picture of a guy. Not a kid but a man, a handsome cat."

"How old a man did he look like?"

"Gee, he was real old, at least thirty."

"What did he look like? What color was his hair?"

"Hair? I think he was a baldy. But he had a big face and seemed to be laughing. I mean, he looked

like a guy who's always laughing and clowning. I asked who he was but Clara would never say. But I had a feeling he was the guy she'd found."

LATE THAT afternoon Straw was sitting opposite Mancino in the squad room. His soggy face was full of tired lines. He said, "I showed Clara's photo to the men at the meat company; nobody recalls seeing her before. I've talked to the witnesses: they all tell about the same story but one of the witnesses is this big blond man who was nearest to Clara when she fell off the platform."

"You've sure had a busy day. As for the blond guy, remember it took about a dozen minutes for the Transit police to get there, more time before they phoned us. Probably a lot of other folks saw the shooting but left on the train."

"Nobody left on that train. It took them an hour to jack up the subway car, remove the kid's body."

"Okay, so they walked out of the station and took a bus. Straw, I still don't understand why you're knocking yourself out over a nutty kid who—"

"Clara wasn't nutty. She was a smart kid, a—"

"The smartest ones flip the fastest," Mancino cut in.

"Maybe. But I don't think this kid flipped. Mama seems to have been more of a work horse than a mother, bitter about giving the kid the best years of her life and all that slop. So maybe Clara wasn't happy at home, but most kids aren't. Mama says she has no idea who the man is that Clara was looking for, and found. No sex angle, but there was a man.

"Another thing, I checked with the travel agency who sent Mrs. Morris the circulars. She was definitely going to Israel soon and ready to spend nearly twelve hundred dollars. She told them over the phone that she'd be ready to go in about a month. Where was she

going to get a grand or two from?"

Mancino shrugged his heavy shoulders. "She had that insurance from her rummy husband, remember? Perhaps she was going to borrow on that. Or she found some money. Or she was playing the horses. Straw, what's the point of making a hard-working old woman into a small time blackmailer?"

"The point," Straw said sullenly, "is that she didn't call for help. I think Mrs. Morris was being threatened by somebody, therefore involved in some kind of deal. Not with Clara, of course. Another thing, some of the witnesses believe the kid was astonished when the gun went off."

"What's that supposed to mean? You're holding a loaded gun on a person, you pull the trigger. How can you be surprised when the gun works? Listen to me, Straw—when a kid kills a total stranger for no reason, that adds up to a nut, in my book."

"Maybe. But there still are too many things here that don't jell, Lieutenant."

"Okay, you're the homicide man. What do you want me to do now?"

"Keep a tap on Mrs. Morris' phone and have a man watch her apartment."

Mancino grinned. "She didn't have a phone. And I have her place her under surveillance. Anything else?"

"I'll be in touch."

"You keep in touch with your bed. You look bushed."

When Straw called his office the following morning there was a note to phone a Mr. Parks. Straw dialed the number, a downtown one, and a man said, "I'm Charles' father. Now look here, officer, I realize you have a job to do but so do I—to protect my son. Charlie told me something which may have some bearing on this mess, but I don't want him to get into any trouble, or have his name in the papers. Can you absolutely guarantee that?"

"Not until I know what he told you, Mr. Parks. I'm not out to hurt your boy, only to find a killer. What did he tell you?"

"Well, when this girl helped Charlie with his school work, they didn't want the other students to see this, so they used to go to a park near the school. Charles said one day it started to rain and they ran into some bushes for cover, found a zip-gun there. Now Charlie didn't take the gun, neither did the girl. But after he talked to you yesterday my son went to the park—the gun was gone. He hadn't broken any law and I don't want—"

"Damn, I've wasted a day. But don't you worry about it!" Straw snapped.

In the park Charlie showed Straw where the zip-gun had been hidden, added, "Every time we were here, we'd look to see if it was still there."

"When you first found it, did you pick the gun up, Charlie?"

"I—yes sir. We both examined it. Then I put it back. I want no part of guns."

"Was there a bullet in it?"

"I'm sure there wasn't. You see, I showed Clara how it worked. You know, when you pull the trigger the big rubber band drives a nail point into the firing cap of the bullet, acts like a firing pin. There wasn't any bullet in it."

"How come you know so much about guns?"

"From TV shows," Charlie said nervously.

"Now think carefully. Did you ever find any bullets buried around where you found the gun?"

"No sir."

"And when was the last time you saw the gun here?"

Charlie screwed up his face in thought. "This is Friday. I had a darn history quiz Monday afternoon. Lunch period, Monday, was the last time. Clara drilled me on some stuff about the War of Eighteen Twelve. Then, before we headed back for school, we looked in the bushes. The gun was there. After you talked to me yesterday I came here and the gun was gone. Mister, am I in trouble?"

"No. But the next time you find a weapon, don't wait to report it, Charlie," Straw said, his voice almost gentle.

When Straw phoned Lieutenant Mancino to tell him about the gun, Mancino said, "We've been going through the dead woman's apartment and found some figuring she'd been doing on a bit of scrap paper. She'd taken twenty percent of thirty thousand dollars, which came to six thousand dollars. Then she'd written 'penalties' and changed the six grand to twelve thousand and five-hundred dollars. Then she'd taken ten percent of that and circled the results: one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars. I don't know if it means a thing but that one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars would be what she needed for traveling."

"Twenty percent and ten percent?" Straw repeated. "Sounds like income tax. I'll look into that. Mancino, can you have one of your men take a picture of Sam Lunigan, without his knowing you are doing it?"

"I guess so. What for?"

"I don't know for certain, yet. Have a dozen copies of the photo made. I'll be in the squad room within a few hours, will want a couple of men. I'm going to see Mrs. Smith again, now."

Sitting on the couch in her neat living room, wearing a worn robe, Wanda Smith looked pitifully plain and drawn, a woman abused by life. Straw said, "There's one thing I forgot to ask your neighbor yesterday. Did you ever hear the name Lunigan?"

Wanda looked up too quickly,

then away. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"Mrs. Morris worked for the Lunigan Meat Company."

"I don't know them; never had any dealings with them."

"Did you ever know anybody named Lunigan? Did Clara?" Straw asked harshly.

Wanda took a deep breath. "I won't have Clara's name dirtied up! I—her father was Zack Lunigan. He was a no good drifter. My God, I've worked all my life, was paying my own rent by the time I was Clara's age. And the two men I've been involved with were both spongers. Anyway, Zack was killed at sea. When he couldn't get me to support him, off he'd go on a ship."

"Not so fast. When did Zack Lunigan die?"

"When Clara was four. I never told her he was dead. How can you explain death to a kid? I just said he'd gone away. When she was older, well, the lie was already planted. When I married Smith, he legally adopted Clara, gave her his name."

"Didn't you know that all this traveling around Clara was doing, that she probably was looking for her father?"

Wanda gave out a weary sigh. "Of course. Lord, I work hard all day, drive myself, I'm exhausted when I come home. But with all her smartness, Clara could never seem to understand *that*. She was always throwing up to me what other girls' mothers were doing for them, taking them here and there. As for Zack, all she remembered of him was his smile, his big voice, not the louse he really was. Every time she went looking for him, it was a stab in the heart for me!"

"What makes you certain Zack is dead?"

"He was in a tanker fire at sea; the entire crew died."

"But if he was a merchant marine sailor he would have been under Social Security; you could have collected support for yourself and Clara?"

"All I could collect would have been the only thing I ever got from him, a hard time!" Wanda said fiercely. "Zack forgot to tell me he was already married when we first met. Now you know!"

"Take it easy; I have to ask these things. Did Zack have any relatives here?"

"No. He was an orphan, same as me. That's what I kept telling Clara, but she went on looking for him. It's not a common name, but there must be over fifty Lunigans in the phone book and she went to every damn one of them, asking. Always asking if they knew her father, where he was. If I had told her he was dead, after all these years, she wouldn't have believed me. I sweated out my life giving her food and a roof but she could only think of finding that bum!"

"Do you have a photo of Zack?"

"Yes. He was a vain louse, sending me pictures of himself from Rio or England or Turkey. But he never thought of sending a dollar along, just his crummy photo."

Wanda returned from the bedroom wth an old picture of a rugged looking, smiling man. Pocketing the snap, Straw asked, "Zack's wife, where does she live?"

"Down South, near New Orleans. Zack deserted her and their three kids, too. He was an all-round louse. I've always been a decent woman, no matter what you may think, lonely and working, working—"

IN THE SQUAD room, comparing photos of Zack Lunigan and Sam Lunigan, Lieutenant Mancino said, "Not the same man, obviously."

Straw nodded. "Still, there is a kind of likeness: bull necks, wide faces, meaty lips. I called the Internal Revenue. Naturally they were cagey over the phone, even after checking my shield number and name with headquarters. Seems Mrs. Morris had been in, asking what the reward was for informing on a guy withholding income. That's where the ten percent came in."

"Informing on who?"

"She hadn't given them any facts, merely asking. But it has to be Sam Lunigan, since she was his bookkeeper. There's Sam, knowing she was about to blow the whiste on him, sweating. And along comes Clara Smith-Lunigan, desperately searching for her daddy. She went to every Lunigan in the phone book; she went to Sam. I think he talked the kid into shooting Mrs. Morris. Probably said he'd take Clara to her father if she did it."

"But when he couldn't, Clara would have told the police everything?"

"Straw gave him a sour grin. "I'm positive we'll find Sam was the blond joker on the subway station, that he *pushed* Clara in front of the train after the shooting."

Mancino sucked in his breath. "Straw, I've checked. Lunigan hasn't any record. Are you telling me an ordinary business-man-type would go for a double murder, including knocking off a kid? That I don't buy. Hell, Lunigan could have paid off his back taxes, if he was caught, in time payments. At worst, if Uncle Sam could prove fraud, he would have done a few months in jail. A man doesn't kill twice to get out from under *that* little pile."

"If we knew exactly why people turn to crime, we'd both be out of jobs," Straw said. He glanced at his watch. "There's not many stores selling wigs and make-up, we should have heard from your men by now."

Sam Lunigan was in his office

when Straw and Mancino entered. He denied everything until they told him a clerk had positively identified his picture as the man he had sold a blond wig and moustache to, four days ago. Then Sam seemed to go to pieces, big body shrinking in the old chair.

He mumbled, "I swear, killing wasn't to be any part of it! I swear it on my father's grave! Clara was only to frighten Eva. Oh that nosey biddy! I told her I'd give her double the reward money, but she had to be one of these righteous citizens, turning me in to do her duty and all that crap! Talking about duty and ruining me! Then I tried to frighten her, said I'd hire goons to kill her. I don't know if she was really scared or not. What a mess!"

Sam's voice faded and the office was full of a dull silence until Straw asked coldly, "How did you get the girl to kill Mrs. Morris?"

"There wasn't to be any killing! The gun was Clara's idea!"

"Cut it out. The girl's dead, can't defend herself," Mancino growled.

"Officers, I swear it! The kid had been around, pestering me that I must be her uncle and where was her father? She used to drive around with me late in the afternoon, when I had a rush delivery to make in my car. I'd make the delivery and then drive her up to her neighborhood. You see, it started because I felt sorry for the kid, tried to let her down easy.

"Instead of telling her I never heard of this Zack, I said I'd ask around in my family. She—Clara happened to overhear me cursing Eva out, to myself, I was that upset. I told her the old lady was ruining me and Clara said she had this zip-gun and what if she fired a blank at Eva, scared the hell out of her?"

Sam's voice died again. He looked at the two officers. "I know how it looks, letting a kid do your dirty work, but hell, I was in a bind, would go to jail if Eva blew the whistle. As for hiring punks, I don't know any thugs. Then I had this idea of wearing a wig, being on the subway platform to see what happened, protect the girl and—"

"Protect her?" Straw snarled.

"Yes, protect her! So help me, I swear it! What happened was this: Clara didn't get a blank but a real bullet. She said she'd take care of it but maybe she didn't know the difference. I should have done that part myself. That's why Clara looked so startled when Eva went down. I was trying to grab the kid, take her out of there, for her own good—and mine—when she dodged me and fell in front of the train. Guess she didn't recognize me in the wig. That's the truth!"

Mancino said, "So you owed back taxes. That's not a real big jam."

Lunigan groaned. "Listen, most little business men take something off the top. Say you gross three

hundred dollars a day: you make it two hundred and eighty dollars for the records, pocket the twenty bucks. Doctors, lawyers, anybody dealing in cash, does the same thing. May sound small time, but twenty dollars a day means one hundred dollars a week, five grand a year, if your business can stand it. Well, in five years you have twenty-five thousand dollars.

"My trouble was, I was chicken, I never even took the money out of the office—I kept it in a special petty cash box. In case the Feds ever came down on me I'd plead dumb, pay the back taxes, but it wouldn't be fraud. However, Eva got wise to the deal because—"

Sam Lunigan shut his eyes, then opened them wide, glanced around the room wildly, said, "Okay, how can I be in any more trouble than I am? I'll tell you everything. The meat I buy from the slaughter houses has a government inspected stamp on it. Now, there's always 'hot' meat around. Nothing wrong with it. I couldn't risk giving my customers rotten meat.

"About a year ago I set up a dummy meat company, rented a freezer out of town, started buying up some stolen meat, with my secret petty cash. Like I'd buy four hundred pounds of beef at the regular price from the slaughter houses, then, at night, I'd bring in two hundred pounds of my stolen beef, make up six hundred pounds of hamburger. Hell—"

Lunigan had been talking so rapidly he stopped to get his breath. Then he said, "Sure, it was illegal, but I wasn't hurting anybody. I started making a good buck until Eva stumbled on one of the phony meat company bills, then to my secret petty cash. Maybe she knew about the 'hot' meat and maybe she didn't, but once she went to the tax men, it would all come to light. My business would be ruined, I'd go to jail. Look, I busted my back building up this business, fighting and clawing for every dollar I—Okay, it's over. I'm finished. But murder wasn't any part of things. You must believe that!"

Straw asked harshly, "You kidding? Here's what I believe: you substituted a real twenty-two for the blank, which was why Clara Smith looked astonished when Eva dropped. And you weren't on the subway platform to see what happened, but to push the girl under the train, escape in the confusion."

"That's not so! I'm not a monster!" Lunigan screamed.

Mancino said, "Mr. Lunigan, under the law I have to tell you that anything you say can be used against you. We're cops, not the jury. What we believe doesn't matter. It's what we can prove. We'll test your story for the truth, try to bust it open if we think you're lying. The final decision will be what the jury believes. Let's go." Mancino cuffed Lunigan's hands.

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The Peepshow Murder

by JOHN JAKES

RED LIGHTS, blue lights, green lights, yellow lights. None of them made any difference to Carsten. None of them made any sense. Carsten had been drunk for days —weeks, maybe.

The lights in the arcade hurt his eyes. In such brightness, he was a little more conscious of his beard, his filthy clothes. Several boys made loud remarks about winos. Bells rang in the shooting gallery up front. Carsten could not exactly remember how he'd gotten here in the rear of the arcade.

The rows of old-fashioned iron claw-legged peepshow machines looked strange. The titles meant little. *Baseball Hits of the Century. Harem Wiggles. Nuit de Amore. Fistic Action.* He didn't know whether he had fed a dime into the slot of the peepshow in front of him. A light had come on to illuminate the title, *Touchdown Heroes*, so he supposed he had. He leaned his head over and placed his eyes against the cuplike metal viewing tube and began to turn the metal crank.

Inside the machine, a succession of tawdry yellowing cards, each with a photo pasted on it, flipped past to form a jerky action sequence. The football players' uniforms, especially their helmets, looked twenty years old.

Sick at his stomach, yet wishing for another slug of wine, Carsten closed his eyes while he half propped himself on the viewing tube. He opened his eyes a mo-

Drunk he was, certainly. Crazy? Perhaps. Anyway, by lurching into a tawdry honkytonk, paying a dime, he could watch a woman get murdered!

ment later. His stomach hurt. He clutched the side of the machine with one hand and cranked with the other.

A new sequence of pictures was flipping past. Sharp, of high contrast, clear definition, as against the yellowed football sequence. The scene was a brightly lighted section of a room. A man with his back to the camera lens was bending over. The man wore a pinstripe suit. He had his hands around the throat of a young woman with a mole on her chin.

The man was strangling the woman, tugging her from side to side.

Suddenly he released her. The sequence continued jerkily as the man stood up and the woman's mouth sagged open, her eyes glazed. There were ugly marks on her throat. Carsten knew she was dead. What's more, he knew who—

Suddenly the football pictures began.

In addition to all the other devils of dirtiness, misery, self-disgust which tormented him, new demons began to haunt Carsten then. He knew the woman who had been strangled to death. Her name was Beth Albertson. She waited on tables in The Argosy Grille, just down the street.

He knew because he had often stopped off there when his tour of duty was over, before going home to his bachelor apartment. The pictures in the peepshow showed Beth Albertson being strangled to death by—somebody.

Carsten wiped the back of his mouth, closed his eyes tightly. He was going crazy, he told himself. He'd been drunk for days. All the sauce—good rye, then cheap rye, then wine, had rotted the insides of his mind, that was it. He was either dreaming or crazy. And he wasn't dreaming. The pain in his middle was too real.

He had to watch the peepshow again to be sure. Furtively he glanced up toward the front of the arcade. Greek Billy, the fat proprietor with the old-fashioned mustaches, was shooing the young kids outside into the neon-blotched darkness. Greek Billy was not Greek but of obscure European origin. He'd gotten his name through his half Greek mother. Carsten had never liked Greek Billy.

Carsten dug in his filthy pants for his last change. With a hand whose nails were crusted with an accumulation of dirt, he fed his last ten-cent piece into the slot.

He bent over. He watched in horror and fascination while the long-forgotten football players scrimmaged, the quarterback faded, the ball spiraled jerkily from the quarterback's fingers as card after yellow card flipped past. An end was racing out, was under the ball, reaching up for it, higher—

The scene was suddenly the

apartment, every detail of the cheap furniture harsh and highly illuminated. Carsten's throat constricted. He watched the sequence from beginning to end, as the man in the pinstripe choked Beth Albertson to death.

As soon as the football players appeared, Carsten turned the crank furiously, as if trying to will the machine to continue. But his allotted period was over. The viewing area went black.

Gulping air, Carsten went up front. "Billy? Billy, can you change this quarter?"

Greek Billy wrinkled his noise. "Get lost, Carsten. You stink."

"The marked bills in my locker weren't mine." Carsten hit his fist on the counter. His voice sounded like a sob in his own ears. "Billy, those bills weren't mine. Somebody planted them in the locker."

Greek Billy picked up a racing form. "Beat it, will you, Carsten? You give the place a lousy name. You're bad news around here. Haven't you got that figured out yet?"

Carsten blinked. He was sobering a little. "I'm not off the force yet, Billy, just suspended. It doesn't mean a thing. The review board will reinstate me when—"

"Look," Greek Billy said with some weariness, "will you get out of here, Carsten? I'm not going to change the quarter, so just get out."

"The board can't just wipe me off the books," Carsten said. "I've been on the force for ten years. I had a good record. They can't just wipe that out for a single mistake—a mistake that wasn't even mine."

The arcade proprietor shrugged. "On some jobs you can make a lot of mistakes. When you're a cop, you get just one. I know. My brother's a cop in Newark. One spot of mud on the shield and you're out. It has to be that way, Carsten. Otherwise, who'd pay any attention to what a cop says?

Greek Billy shook his head, disgusted with himself. "I don't know why I stand around talking to you. Get out of here, bum. You're stewed. You are just wasting my time . . .

I was Carsten thought. *I was until I saw those pictures of Beth Albertson being choked.*

"Billy, listen to me. I need a dime. Change this quarter. One of those machines back there has some pictures in it of—of—"

Carsten found he could not continue. It was simply too incredible. His head hurt. His stomach ached. He smelled sour. But he was no longer dizzy. The effects of the last half pint of muscatel had worn off. He was practically sober. And he was a little frightened.

Fortunately, the fright helped diminish the feelings of self-pity which had dogged him during his recent days of wanderings from bar to bar. He had just enough strength to straighten up and say

to Greek Billy, "Okay, you go to hell. I'll be back."

On the sidewalk, he sniffed the warm May air. The dampness of approaching rain mingled in the night with the exhaust fumes of an uptown bus pulling away from the corner. Under the streetlight, beside Frankel's Hock-O-Rama, some boys in scarlet satin jackets were pitching pennies and laughing. Carsten started in that direction.

He passed the boys, gave them a tough glare that somehow stilled their nasty comments about lush coppers. A portable radio in a window over the corner played a noisy popular tune called *Casserole.* Carsten dodged across the intersection at what seemed like a run but was actually more of a stumble. A car honked, squealed its brakes.

How would they know? Carsten asked himself, over and over. He didn't have the faintest idea of who *they* were, of course. It was a convenient term. How would they know he would go into the arcade?

They wouldn't, except for the fact that he had been hanging around various bars in the neighborhood lately, and, in his condition, would be a fair bet to wander into any open spot sooner or later.

All right, he asked himself—but how would they know he might pick a peepshow?

Well, they wouldn't, exactly. But, since Greek Billy's Fun Emporium was one of the few places besides bars open after dark, they might guess that he would go in and look at a peepshow, because he was crazy about sports. He always read the sports pages first.

All right, but how would they know which particular peepshow he would pick? Actually, he went for baseball most. He favored the Rockets. But he'd picked the football peepshow, even though he was drunk. Something about a red strip.

A red—

Leaning against the building, Carsten thought he might be sick. The trembling passed.

There had been a red strip over the coin slot of the machine just to the left of the football machine. Now he remembered. Crude printed words on the strip.

He tried to recall them. *Out of Order.*

That was the peepshow on the left. And the peepshow on the right. *Out of Order,* with a red strip.

Either Carsten was going completely nuts, which was possible, or he had been in a peepshow arcade where all the machines except one or two bore *Out of Order* strips on their coin slots. He could close his eyes and get a picture of the rows of machines. One, two, half a dozen strips. The mental image now was far sharper than the one he had while he was actually standing half-soused in front of the *Touch-*

down Heroes unit, ready to feed in a coin.

But who were *they?* He knew dozens of people in the neighborhood, hundreds. And they knew him. All about him, all about his case.

The lights of The Argosy Grille twinkled. Carsten swallowed violently.

He pushed through the swinging door.

He recognized several of the men at the bar. Hastily he averted his eyes. Two or three noisy conversations became muted. Carsten walked unsteadily to the empty front end of the bar. By the dim backbar lights, Leon was a skinny shadow whose head was illuminated with bluish highlights from behind, eerily.

"No more credit, Carsten. Sorry," Leon said.

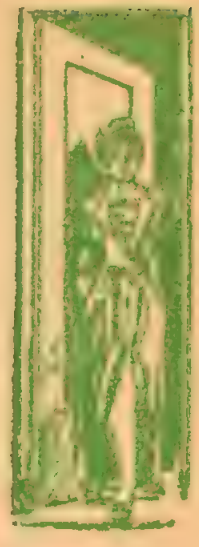
"I don't want a drink," Carsten said, almost surprised by the sound of his own words. "I want to—I want to see Beth Albertson."

Leon gestured to a straggle-haired waitress in a frowsy uniform carrying a pair of stingers from bar to a booth. "Beth isn't here. Rose is on tonight. I had to call her."

Carsten's hands began to tremble. "Why? Why did you have to call her?"

"Because Beth didn't show up. I don't get it. She's usually dependable."

"Was Beth here last night?"



Carsten asked, almost afraid to do so.

Leon shook his head. "Didn't show up at the usual time. I phoned her place over on Hale Street. No answer. I don't know what's happened to her. Maybe some relative out of town got sick or something. But she's the type who would let me know. At least I thought she would."

Leon frowned more deeply, then roused himself from his thoughts.

"Why are you so interested in Beth, Carsten? She doesn't make that much in tips that she could afford to give you a loan. Especially when you'd just blow it on booze, feeling sorry for yourself, instead of trying to stand up and clear yourself with the board."

"I know, I—I made a mistake. I just kind of went off half cocked," Carsten began.

He was emerging for the first

time from the days of drunkenness, and he was seeing himself honestly. Instead of trying to do something about the accusation of being a fix-taker, he'd gone off the emotional deep end. That was because he'd always prided himself on being an honest policeman.

Maybe he had paraded the honesty bit too far. Maybe his tendency to be overly friendly with the people in the neighborhood, the barkeeps, the shop owners, his tendency to drop in and visit when things were quiet, could be misinterpreted. Maybe for the first time now, he was discovering that he wasn't perfect, that his mistake of being too friendly, coupled with the planted money, could be seen as something else. Maybe he was turning into a man.

Or maybe—and this was more likely—he was going nuts.

Because if Leon didn't know what had happened to Beth Albertson, Carsten did. Carsten had seen the pictures flickering by in the peepshow's drum. He had seen Beth Albertson's throat marked by the fingers of the faceless man in the pinstripe suit.

He had seen her, mouth open, staring at the merciless camera lens, seen her wide open eyes, the film of saliva drying on her even white teeth as her mouth hung open in death. He had seen it.

Or had he?

Uncertain again, his belly aching, Carsten left the Argosy Grille. Just before the leather door slapped shut, Carsten heard a snatch of conversation from the bar:

"—caught him with the fix money he took for looking the other way when the policy collecters came around. Drove him crazy when headquarters found out he wasn't the big honest squarehead he always pretended—"

The door shut.

In the warm night, Carsten was uncertain about what to do next. He pushed back his filthy sleeve to look at his watch, only to recall vaguely that he had pawned it several days ago at the Hock-O-Rama. He wandered down the sidewalk, looked in the window of Irving's Twenty-Four Hour Pharmacy. His eyes slid past the big, colorful cigarette window display. The illuminated wall clock showed a little after nine.

There was only one person to whom he could tell the story. The man who had defended him when he was suspended. Milo Prescott would be finishing his trick at ten; if Carsten were lucky, he could catch him behind the precinct house when he emerged and headed for his own car to go home.

Garbage smells befouled the alley behind the precinct house. As Carsten stumbled down the alley alongside the grimy two-story brick building, he glanced in through the open windows. The old-fashioned yellow-globed lights shining on the

hideous tan plaster walls shed the warmest glow he had ever seen in his life. Typewriters clicked. There was Sergeant Lou LaRocca talking on the telephone. Bitterly, Carsten averted his head.

He wasn't a wino, he wasn't a suspended policeman, he wasn't just those things, he was more—he was going crazy. *Flick flick flick* went the peepshow pictures in his head. Beth Albertson's tongue protruded as the man in the pin stripe stepped back from her corpse . . .

"MILO? Milo, over here—Milo!"

Carsten hissed it in the dark, crouching under the warehouse wall beside Prescott's parked sedan. Carsten had waited more than forty-five minutes in the darkness. At last plainclothes detective Milo Prescott had emerged, a big, chunky, friendly-faced man with kinky dark hair beginning to grizzle.

Prescott had come out of the dimly lighted rear entrance of the precinct house. Now, hearing the call, he raised his right hand carefully to the lapel of his suit. Carsten took a chance and stood up.

Two other plainclothes detectives who had come out a few seconds before were just driving out of the lot in their cars. They did not see him.

Milo Prescott recognized Carsten, rushed over.

Listen, this is the last place in the world you should be hanging around."

"Milo, don't give me any lectures. I—I need your help."

"Carsten, I've done everything I can for you. You know I thought it was a bum deal. I'm willing to say so to the review board. But what the hell good is it going to do, if you act the way you've been acting? Stumbling around the neighborhood gassed to the gills? Look at you. You're filthy." Prescott shoved Carsten into the shadows beside the wall.

"Now get the hell out of sight before somebody sees you. Go home and sleep it off. When you show up at the board hearing next week, try to act like a sane man who's supposed to be innocent."

Scratching at the stubble on his chin, Carsten tried to find words. "Milo, I know I've made plenty of mistakes. But tonight I was down at Greek Billy's—I saw—" Disjointedly, seeking for the right words, he spilled out what he had seen.

Milo Prescott lit a cigarette. "Were you drunk, Carsten?"

"No—I mean, yes, I was drunk. But I sobered up fast. I tell you, Milo, every damn machine in that place was taped *Out of Order* except that one. And Beth hasn't been to work at the Argosy Grille since day before yesterday. She's disappeared, Milo."

Prescott inhaled heavily, his cigarette a point of orange fire. "What

you say doesn't make sense. Somebody mounting pictures of a murder on cards in a peepshow machine?"

"I know it doesn't make sense. But I saw it, Milo! For God's sake come with me and take a look for yourself."

Prescott sighed, nodded. "It's screwy. But—okay, Carsten. Get in."

They cruised out of the alley, turned left, and after waiting for a produce truck to pass, Prescott U-turned in front of Greek Billy's Fun Emporium. Carsten got out on the street side. Prescott pulled the keys, shut the door, and started to walk around the hood.

As Carsten was about to shut the door on his side, he noticed something gleaming, half-wedged between the bottom and back seats on the driver's side. Carsten blinked. The circular something had a faint yellow shine. He decided it must be the neon lights, and that Prescott had lost a half dollar out of his pants pocket.

"Hi, Billy," Prescott said as they entered. Greek Billy glanced up, then frowned.

"Oh, hi, Milo. What's up?"

"Nothing, Billy. Carsten thought he lost a key back in the back. I was on my way home and told him I'd help him look for it."

"Well, go ahead," Billy said, ignoring Carsten.

Carsten hurried ahead to the rows of peepshows at the rear of the empty arcade. He stopped. Cold sweat ran down under his arms, smelling sour. His eyes moved from machine to machine.

"There's—there should be *Out of Order* strips on all these," he said.

Already Prescott's expression was pitying. "There's no sign on any of them."

"But damn it—" Carsten began, then choked it off. "Give me a dime."

Prescott handed over a coin. With a shaking hand, Carsten fed it into the slot of *Touchdown Heroes*. While he turned the crank furiously, he stood back.

"Go ahead, Prescott. Look. You'll see it."

For nearly a minute and a half, Milo Prescott bent over the viewing piece. When he stood up, Carsten's belly was empty and weighed like a stone.

"Just a few football plays, Carsten."

Knowing what he would see, knowing he was losing his grip, Carsten took the other dime when Prescott said, "Here, see for yourself."

Slowly Carsten began to turn the crank. The quarterback faded. The ball spiraled. The end leaped high, higher as the yellow, cracked old cards flicked by. Furiously Carsten increased the speed of the crank. Faster, faster—

The play was completed, the end scored the run, the sequence began

again. The lights inside the unit went out.

Carsten straightened up. Prescott was peeling a five-spot from his wallet.

"Let's go, Carsten. Maybe what you need is more, not less. Here. I'm—sorry."

Sounding as though he actually were, Prescott turned his back and hurried off. He climbed into his car and drove away.

Carsten stared after him, the five clutched in his filthy hands. Greek Billy gestured.

"Do your waitin' someplace else, Carsten. Drunken nuts like you we can do without around here."

Carsten spun. "You damn rotten liar, I saw—" Then he stopped.

He turned, shaking his head. He hurried out and into The Minuet two doors down and ordered a half pint of wine.

Hours later, or days, or weeks—it was hard to tell—Carsten came to again.

Rough brick pressed against the back of his head. He lay with the base of his spine against the wall of a building in an alley. He heard laughter, so far away as to be nothing but an echo.

He tried to move. His right leg twitched and he went through a horrible period of queasiness. When his vision grew less fuzzy again, he stared at the object against which his twitching leg was knocking. On the label of the empty bottle, a drawing of a bunch of pale grapes gleamed in the faint light reflecting from the main street a good distance away.

Again the faint, brittle laughing rose.

"Carsten? Carsten, how are you feeling? Ready to cross over, Carsten? To our side?"

Carsten sat up. "Who's that?"

He attempted to stand. The laughing seemed to come from the even more intense blackness away down on his left, where this alley intersected another branch of the same system.

"Who's there?"

He scrambled up, his filthy clothing gritty against his skin.

"Only me, Carsten, just little me. Ready to cross over, Carsten?"

"That sounds like—" The words refused to come. He peered groggily ahead.

At the intersection of the two alleys, a light shone, standing out on an iron stanchion high above the service entrance of a loft building, and shaded by a round cone of tin. At the periphery of this light, a face seemed to float, now dim, now sharp.

Maybe his own eyes were causing the blurring. His shoes clacked as he staggered ahead. He hardly dared say it: "That sounds like Beth."

Laughing at him, teeth white, the little mole a brilliant spot against her skin, Beth's head swam in the light. And her throat,

marked with ugly, ugly red strangulation marks.

"Come here, Beth," Carsten yelled, running, not sober yet not drunk.

Beth's face blurred, misted back into shadow. *"I can't, Carsten, I can't. I'm already on the other side. The side where the dead people are. Ready to cross over to us, Carsten?"*

"You're not dead," Carsten screamed. "There weren't any pictures. I imagined them."

"Where, Carsten?" the voice mocked. *"In the arcade? Or in your head? You saw the marks on my throat. I'm on the other side now. And you're ready to cross over, aren't you? First your mind. It may take a while for your body to come along, but your mind is already on its way to the other side. Isn't it, Carsten? Isn't it?"*

"You're not dead," he sobbed, charging at the light and across it. He slammed cruelly hard into a board fence in the darkness at the alley's far side, slid down, moaning, "You're not dead. I was drunk. I'm cracking up. I didn't see those pictures."

But he had seen them, flickering in the peepshow. And he had seen Beth's dead face, and her throat, only moments ago, the strangle marks all red on it.

The noise had attracted a couple of late-night strollers at the end of the alley. One of them, the man, shouted for a policeman.

Carsten got to his feet, lurched down the alley the other way. He came out opposite Irving's Twenty-Four Hour Cash Pharmacy. He scanned the street both ways. A passing car, nothing more.

He dashed across the street, headed along the sidewalk past the drugstore. He was certain that if they caught him now, he would be locked up. Maybe he should be locked up. He was going out of his mind. He—

Lights blazed up. Carsten reeled back against the plate glass of the Twenty-Four Hour Pharmacy.

The prowl car had approached from the precinct house with only its parking lights on. Now, with Carsten in sight, the brights had been switched on. Around the other corner came the beat cop on the run. Carsten recognized him. Stan Pearldorf, a young rookie, closely followed by the couple who had heard Carsten screaming in the alley.

The prowl car doors slammed. Crouched against the window, Carsten recognized Lieutenant Loomis, several other men. Loomis had drawn his gun.

"Carsten? You'd better come along. It looks like you need a psychiatrist more than you need a hearing by the police review board."

Images whirled, danced in Carsten's mind. The flickering football play of the peepshow. The sudden interruption of the brightly-lit

apartment, the murder scene played over and over against a crazy background of peepshow machines which one minute had *Out of Order* strips taped over their coin slots, and the next minute did not. No, Carsten's mind cried, no, he wasn't crazy!

The police approached warily. Carsten couldn't face being locked up. The psychiatrists would make a monkey of him. He would be finished then. Being charged with mental illness—even the suspicion of mental illness—would be enough to ruin him forever. If only he could get hold of what was skating, floating in his wine-fumed mind—

Turning to face Lieutenant Loomis and the others approaching from the prowl car, Carsten glanced in the pharmacy window. A lithographed display stood there. He had seen it, before, tonight. It featured a big cutout of a beautiful girl with a cork-ended cigarette poised at her lips.

Take A Tip, read the copy headline. *Try This Superior Filter*—

"Stand easy, Carsten, and you won't get hurt," said Lieutenant Loomis, advancing.

Carsten imagined he looked like a scarecrow, his hair matted and filthy, as he half smiled at the police whom he was trusting not to shoot in that scant instant he would have before they reacted. A filter. Take a tip—a *filter*. He laughed raggedly.

Once as a boy, he'd been given a box camera. In later years he'd taken it out a few times, even read a high-priced photography manual, hoping to learn more about it. But his heart hadn't been in it, or his interest. He liked sports a lot more. That was why, earlier, the significance of the round yellow object wedged into the seat of Milo Prescott's car had eluded him. Because he didn't know what to call it. The name had been the blank.

Now he remembered. There were colored filters. Green, red, yellow ones. For camera lenses. The round object had not been a

silvery half dollar at all, reflecting ordinary street light.

With a quick, desperate jerk, Carsten rammed his elbow backwards three times, then covered his head with his hands as the pharmacy's plate glass window shattered and glass rained on him.

The police shouted. Officer Pearldorf raised his gun to fire as the others instinctively ducked backwards.

"Carsten, you're crazy!" Loomis bawled as Carsten ignored the blood streaming down out of the cut in the back of his neck, hit Pearldorf in the stomach and snatched his gun. He was running down the alley before the police moved.

His breath hurt his chest. This was the way he had to do it. Otherwise he would stand accused, by implication, of mental imbalance. Find the apartment. If he could only find the apartment—

A gun banged and a bullet chewed ground-up brick dust into a cloud over his head. Carsten dodged left down an alley, leaped a board fence, raced through an areaway.

He knew the neighborhood well. He was five minutes ahead of his pursuers when he checked the phone book hanging in a public booth on a dimly lighted streetcorner. He found that the address he wanted was two blocks over and down one, on Hale Street. Yes, Leon had mentioned Hale Street.

Through the night Carsten kept running, tormented by more than the sound of engines snarling, sirens whining in pursuit; tormented by the knowledge that unless he found what he hoped to find, he would never have another chance.

And he'd trusted Prescott, thought he was his friend! But as soon as there were rumors from the neighborhood pigeons that someone was taking money to overlook an as-yet unlocated policy wheel, money had appeared in his locker. Planted money, to accuse him and take the suspicion off the real guilty person. And, like a fool, Carsten had gone off the deep end.

But there was always the chance he might recover, prove by his sincerity, perhaps even by a polygraph test when he went before the review board, that he was innocent. So the obvious thing was to put a stain on his record that could never be removed, no matter how polite the upper echelons were about disposing of him.

Mental trouble. Mental difficulties. Hallucinations about people being murdered.

A few photographs, with Greek Billy's cooperation. Maybe Greek Billy's was where the wheel operated. All it took was the photographs in place and the knowledge that, sooner or later, Carsten, wandering the neighborhood, would probably be driven like a sheep in a chute to the particular machine

in the particular row in Greek Billy's Fun Emporium. Maybe even that machine had been taped *Out of Order* until just before he arrived.

And Beth Albertson? Prescott's girl? It could be, it could certainly be.

The alley bit a while ago. Rigged. Prescott, pretending to be his friend, had given him money. Knew Carsten would use it for booze. Waited, and followed him to the alley, and staged the little ghost act when he woke up—

Behind him a prowl car swung around the corner into Hale Street. A voice on a bullhorn blasted the night, "Carsten, stop where you are, or—"

The crash of the vestibule door shut out the rest. Up the stairs Carsten went, after a second beside the fly-specked mailboxes. The bullhorn was making a row. Carsten's hand shook as he raised his foot to kick the door hard once, twice, three times—

The handle twisted. Milo Prescott was there, in shirt sleeves, the laugh on his face frozen. Behind him, like a nightmare, every detail of the apartment of the staged murder stood out clearly.

Prescott leaped back, dove for the gun in his shoulder rig hanging over a wooden chair, whipped it out. His foot tangled in the shoulder strap of the big leather photo gadget bag lying on the rug beside the chair. Prescott's mouth was twisted with rage as he fired, but his foot, catching, drove his aim off. Carsten staggered against the door frame, fired with Pearldorf's gun.

A woman's scream ripped the silence after the shot. Prescott flipped backwards over the chair and sprawled in a crooked heap on the sofa. Below, heavy shoes thudded on stair treads. Another car growled to a stop in Hale Street. Beth Albertson retreated across the apartment.

"Carsten, don't hurt me. Please, please don't use that gun on me."

"No," Carsten said. "No, I wouldn't do that." He kept walking.

"Stay away from me. Are—are you going to hurt me?" the girl said.

"No," Carsten repeated, reaching out with his free hand suddenly. "I'm just going to bring you back to this side, Beth. Let you cross back over to the side of the living to get what's damned well coming to you."

And with two vicious pinching swipes of his filthy fingers, he wiped the phony strangulation marks off her throat, wiped his lipstick smeared hands on his trousers.

Then he waited for his friends, the police to arrive.

LEO G. CARROLL

On your TV screen he's the mildest,
most urbane master spy ever to slit a foe's throat.
Here's what "Mr Waverly" is like in real life.

by WALTER H. SPRINGS

HE LOOKS LIKE a tweedy, shaggy composite of all the absent-minded professors you've ever seen —the kind who never remembers to put on his rubbers when it rains, or pay the electric bill until the power is shut off.

Actually, he happens to be one of the most talented and respected character actors in the business. As Mr. Waverly, the master spy in MGM-ARENA's television series, "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.," Leo G. Carroll brings to his role more than forty years of stirring parts behind the footlights.

In the top Neilsen rating suspense-adventure series on the NBC Television Network, Carroll co-stars with Robert Vaughn and David McCallum.

Away from the camera, minus his makeup, Carroll is the picture of the correct, urbane Briton. A statesman on a holiday from Whitehall, yes. But an elderly, absent-minded cloak-and-dagger expert, never.

Carroll was born of Irish parents in England in 1892. Though his father was an Army man, young Leo turned his back on the military and, as a youth with no thought of acting, became an apprentice wine merchant. Then one day he took part in an amateur theatrical production.

Within a year he made his pro-

fessional debut (1911) on the London stage with a walk-on in "The Prisoner of Zenda" and played the juvenile lead in New York.

London and New York soon became the center of his existence, as the shy, reserved young Englishman built himself a career as an actor. He has been living in this country over forty years.

Carroll has performed prominently in many plays in both lands. His London credits include "The Constant Nymph," "Measure for Measure," "Mrs. Moonlight" and "Too True To Be Good."

Among his early New York credits are "For Services Rendered," "Green Bay Tree," "Petticoat Fever" and "May Wine."

His motion picture career dates from 1934 and includes such memorable films as "Wuthering Heights," "Suspicion," "The House

on 92nd Street," "Rebecca" and "Spellbound."

In the late 1930's and early '40's, he starred on Broadway in "Angel Street," "The Late George Apley," "The Druid Circle" and "Jenny Kissed Me."

The Mr. Waverly character is as baffling, in its own subtle way, as that of Illya.

Mr. Waverly, he of the bad memory and the bumbling, hesitant way of speaking, is of course one of the peak U.N.C.L.E. master minds. A seedy man, standing out in sharp contrast to the sleek operatives with whom he works.

Mr. Waverly handles a pipe all the time, but somehow never gets around to lighting one. He also doesn't care much for hand to hand fighting, but when he gets in one, he's superlatively good at it, probably the most deadly of all his operatives, since he is highly proficient in the use of nearly all lethal weapons.

But when the deadly urgency of the fight is done, Mr. Waverly, much sooner than his volatile comrades, can quickly go back to his statistics and his planning, leaving the rest to argue about who did what in battle.

Mr. Waverly is not too pleased with Napoleon Solo's penchant for girl chasing. He would prefer that his top agent spend more time learning and perfecting the intricacies of his calling.

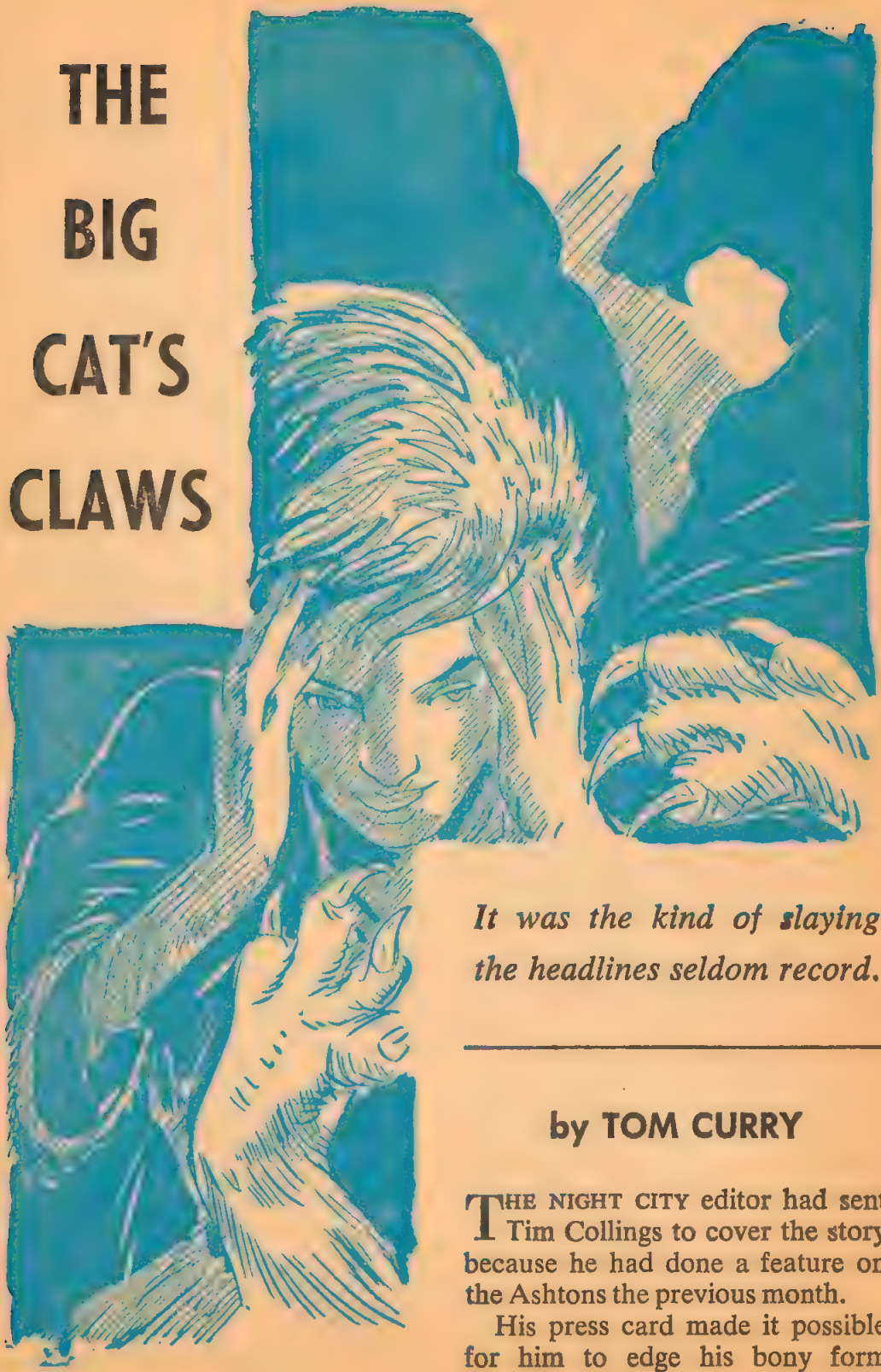
And Mr. Waverly has a disconcerting way of turning up in the most out-of the-way places to check on the work in progress and to be sure that his arch enemy, THRUSH, is not winning any gambits in the life and death game they play. So it is not at all beyond the realm of probability that Solo, hanging from a rafter in wait for an enemy, might look down to see Mr. Waverly, tweedy and baggy kneed and looking very helpless, explaining that he had just dropped in to tell him the only right way to complete an assignment.

But once he sheds his Mr. Waverly role and returns to real life, Leo G. Carroll becomes again an urbane, witty man of the world.

Before his Mr. Waverly role, Carroll was best known to the television audience as the title star of the whimsical "Topper" series and after that as Father Fitz in the "Going My Way" series.

He resides with his wife, Nancy ("she's a Liverpool lass"), in Hollywood. They have a son, William, an industrial engineer, who lives nearby. Carroll spends his spare time away from "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." tinkering with old cars and claims he's almost as good a mechanic and carpenter as he is an actor.

THE BIG CAT'S CLAWS



It was the kind of slaying the headlines seldom record.

---

by TOM CURRY

THE NIGHT CITY editor had sent Tim Collings to cover the story because he had done a feature on the Ashtons the previous month.

His press card made it possible for him to edge his bony form

through the police guard just in time—if you wished to consider it that way.

Collings considered it premature. The sight of the torn female body lying on the polar bearskin rug made him physically ill.

He wasn't hypersensitive. A reporter sees so many awful sights that one more shouldn't have mattered. But Collings had been on a weekend binge, and his digestion was still upset.

The last time he'd seen Ellen Ashton she'd been a robust, smiling woman, assisting and correcting her husband as Jerome Ashton had described various safaris and reminisced as to encounters with lions, tigers, leopards, cobras, elephants and savages. It had been a standard setup, a feature occupying the back page when the edition wasn't crowded.

"It was horrible, horrible!" That was Jerome Ashton, his ruddy face twisted by anguish.

"Take it easy, Mr. Ashton," said Lex O'Brien, the detective in charge. A coroner, photographers and other officals were at work in the large room.

Collings glanced around. It was here that he had recently interviewed the Ashtons. They were wealthy, and had traveled together on their junkets. On the floor were animal skins for rugs, and on the walls hung mounted big game trophies, witch-doctor masks, spears, knives, and weapons of every type. Stuffed bright-plumaged birds stared with glassy eyes from pedestals, and there were cases for rifles.

What had made the Ashtons a bit different from the usual run of explorers was that they had kept a couple of live jungle beasts in special cages in their home. The place was an old mansion which had been surrounded by tall apartment buildings as the city had expanded. The trophy den took up most of the second floor, and at its rear were the cages, with steel doors which could be raised to let the animals through to open-air pens raised over the courtyard.

"I couldn't stop it until it was too late," said Ashton, who sat collapsed in a chair. He put his face in his hands, and sobs shook his stocky, powerful frame.

"Was it the leopard?" asked Collings, swallowing hard.

"Yeah, it was the leopard." Detective O'Brien answered the reporter's question. "Quite a pet for a city home."

A faint odor of burnt powder hung in the air. A heavy rifle leaned nearby, against the wall, its safety catch on.

And just a few feet away from them lay the blasted leopard, its feline beauty dimming as the body cooled. Dried blood and shreds of Ellen Ashton's dress stuck to the heavy claws.

"I couldn't make it in time," moaned Ashton. "And when I did

get in, it took me a couple of seconds to snatch a rifle from the case, load, and maneuver for the shot. If I hadn't taken careful aim, I'd have hit my wife."

"Take it easy," O'Brien urged, a look of deep sympathy in his eyes.

Collings had to get his story. He learned that Ashton had been in another part of the house when he'd heard his wife's screams and rushed in to find the leopard clawing her to death.

"Mr. Ashton, what do you suppose got into the beast?" asked Collings.

Ashton was so shaken Collings had to strain to catch his reply.

"I don't know."

"He was so tame. I remember when I was here before, he let me pat him."

Ashton nodded. "I was as sure of him as I would have been of a pet dog. But it's true about big cats. You can never be absolutely certain about them. I'll never forgive myself."

"It wasn't your fault," Collins replied. "As you say, nobody can ever tell about a wild animal. Your wife knew that leopard so well."

"She did. Ellen often fed him, and Sheila—Sheila can go to the zoo. I want no more cats around this place."

Sheila was the elderly lioness occupying the second cage beside the one from which the leopard had sprung upon Ellen Ashton. The lioness cowered at the back of her pen, trembling in alarm as flash pictures were taken.

Either the leopard's gate catch had been left off, or Mrs. Ashton had opened it. Only one thing was certain. The animal had attacked and killed her.

The couple who worked for them had been out. Tim Collings had met the servants before. The woman acted as cook and housekeeper, while the man served as caretaker and assisted with the animals.

A canvas basket stretcher was wheeled in. Collings had to take a final, closer look—his duty. The gashes were awful, running from the mauled woman's blonde hair down her cheek, which was ripped wide open. The jugular vein had been severed.

Collings was faint with nausea and in order to hide the way he felt from O'Brien and the other detectives he turned away and stared up at the trophies on the walls.

He was familiar with them, as he had examined them item by item, and described them in his former article.

A wire service man came bustling in. It was Ed Levy, a lively, tireless reporter who usually beat Tim Collings to the punch. Levy waved at him, and began asking pertinent questions.

"Ellen Snowden Ashton—forty-six—wife of Jerome Ashton, explorer and hunter—daughter of William Snowden, founder of

Snowden Manufacturing Company of Paterson, silks and woolens—no children—"

This diversion gave Collings chance for a breather. He slipped into a nearby bathroom and took a swig from his silver pocket flask. The liquor's warmth helped. Collings went back in his mind to his previous, happier visit here.

The Ashtons had made an appointment and were expecting him. They had been smiling and talkative. They had coaxed him into gingerly patting the leopard, and the old lioness. He'd examined spears, all sorts of weapons, stuffed animals, shrunken heads, and a hundred other items from darkest Africa and the Matto Grosso.

The two had hung over him, discussing each trophy, and the stories attached to most of them.

"I shot that beast between the eyes at ten paces," Ashton would say. "Fortunately, my aim was good, or I'd have been attacked and—"

"Of course, dear, Smitty was standing by," interrupted Ellen.

"Of course—our white hunter. He assisted."

"Did you ever have to fire on a human being—natives, I mean?" Collings had inquired.

Ashton had hesitated for the barest instant before replying. "Well—you recall troubles between whites and natives in some sections of Africa—"

"Mau-Mau, and all that," broke in Ellen.

"Yes," Aston said. "There have been other manifestations such as the Lion Society, the Leopard Men, and so on."

"I've heard of the Leopard Men," Collins said, nodding.

"They're trained in special killing," began Ashton. "In fact—"

"They wear leopard skins, and under the paws are special steel spikes with which they strike down their victims," chimed in Mrs. Ashton.

Ellen Ashton had kept interrupting her husband; she couldn't help it. Collings had found it annoying, but many women had that

trait, and the reporter had shrugged it off . . .

In the den, he found they were taking out the remains. O'Brien was helping the shaking Ashton from the room. A dark stain showed on the thick pelt mat where the dead woman had lain.

Collings decided to hurry back to his office, type his story and rush it to the city desk before Levy got it on the wire.

He had a last look around at the trophies, so it would all be fresh in his reporter's mind. He would write a vivid, personalized yarn for the first edition. But, he was uneasy. There was something here he couldn't quite explain, and he didn't attempt to at the moment. He rallied himself, caught a cab to the office, uncovered the old typewriter, and began banging it out.

"GOOD JOB," Holton grunted, begrudgingly, double chin pulled in, beady eyes glistening under the green shade he wore. He considered himself an ace newspaperman, and had seen so many on TV and in the movies that he scarcely dared show up without the eyeshade.

Collings felt a slight gratification.

It was worth building up, so he went down to Benny's at the corner to relax.

Collings' story made the front page. The obit editor covered the death notice. A day or two later, a big fire came along to preoccupy Collings.

Three weeks passed when Collings, one rainy night, went into a special bistro not far from his two-cubicle flat. The joint was smallish but inspiring, and it was often favored by people from wealthier echelons of the city.

Collings made the door, and felt the grateful blast of food-odored heat. He hung his wet coat and battered felt hat on a peg. He slipped through the main bar where customers were smirking at the innuendoes of a vulgar comedian. There was a smaller room in back for the dedicated, and Collings reached it, toed the brass rail, and ordered.

As he took his first deep swig, he turned, so his angle of vision widened. Among other patrons, he sighted a man at a corner table with a laughing-eyed vixen twenty years younger than himself. She was a honey, with ruby lips, painted eyes, plenty of bosom—a real honey. Even Collings felt a faint quickening of his masculine pulse.

The man's back was familiar. Collings moved a bit, and the patron turned to give an order to a waiter. It was Jerome Ashton.

This hit Collings. But then, he told himself, what was wrong about it? Ashton was a male. His wife had been dead for weeks. He could afford a babe.

Yet it kept bothering him. He

couldn't shake it off, for there is a bit of the detective in every good reporter. A faint puzzlement, which he'd felt that night Ellen Ashton had died, kept pushing him.

The following afternoon, on his own time, he went over to Probate to check. Ellen Ashton had left her husband most of her large fortune. She was the one who'd had the money.

He phoned, and Jerome Ashton agreed to see him. It was cocktail time when Tim Collings arrived, and Ashton gladhanded him and offered him a drink. The woman housekeeper and the man were around.

"Oh yes, you want a followup story for your paper," nodded Ashton. (Collings had easily explained his call.)

"I plan to start for Venezuela and Colombia next month," Ashton told him. "I'm going into Goajira Indian country. They're headhunters who haunt the trails between the two countries. I'm sure Ellen would want it this way. She wouldn't have wished me to give it up. She had a strong character."

Collings nodded. "Have you dismantled that trophy room?" he asked. "It was a great show place. Perhaps the tragedy—"

"Ellen arranged it," Ashton replied. "I mean to keep it as a monument to her."

"May I take a look at it again?"

"Of course. The animals are gone, you know."

Ashton led him to the den. The polar bear rug had been taken away, another substituted. Collings went to other points first, moving slowly along.

He came to what he was after. And now he *knew*.

It was that tiny detail he'd failed to pin down the night Ellen Ashton had died.

Collings stared at the Leopard Man paraphernalia. He studied the murderous, pointed steel hooks simulating the big cat's claws.

When he'd had his interview with the Ashtons, the metal hooks had been tarnished, darkened by oxidation.

But when he'd looked at the killer claws the night Ellen Ashton had been slain, the points had been scoured clean.

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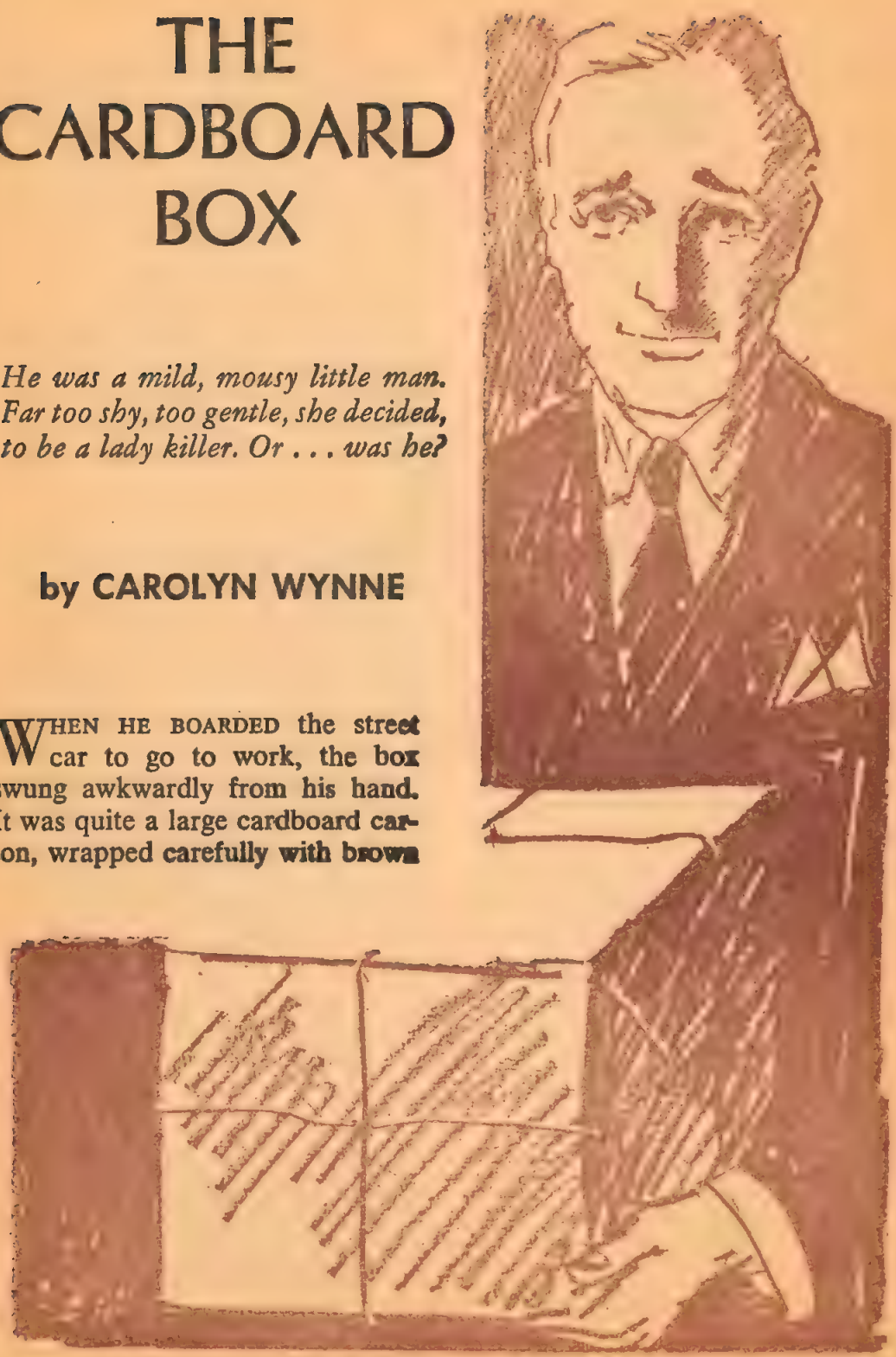
THE CARDBOARD BOX

He was a mild, mousy little man. Far too shy, too gentle, she decided, to be a lady killer. Or . . . was he?

by CAROLYN WYNNE



WHEN HE BOARDED the street car to go to work, the box swung awkwardly from his hand. It was quite a large cardboard carton, wrapped carefully with brown

paper and done up with heavy string. He had attached a wooden handle to the string so that he could carry it more easily.

He paid the conductor and tried to edge unobtrusively past the standing passengers. But the box bumped against a large woman who jutted into the aisle.

"Pardon me," he said politely.

The woman bestowed an angry stare at the large box he was clutching and clucked her tongue disapprovingly.

He bumped by her and found himself in a clear space, meeting the eyes of a co-worker who had miraculously acquired a seat.

"Good morning, Homer," his acquaintance said in his usual cheerful manner. George Rhodes was cheerful in rain or sun. To Homer Appleton, whose brow was always wrinkled with care of one kind or another, he seemed eternally free of worry.

"Good morning, George," Homer replied. "Nice morning, eh?" He tried to shove the box in back of him.

George beamed. "What you got in the box, Homer? Your work clothes?" This referred to a joke the rare book cataloguers at the library shared. They all wore heavy smocks in an attempt to elude the fine antique dust they constantly aroused as they handled each book.

"My wife," Homer answered soberly.

"Your wife," George repeated jovially. Oh, what a funny man that Homer was with his quiet jokes. "Oh, my word, your wife," and George set off on a series of guffaws.

The street car screeched around a corner, the passengers raising their voices to match the interruption. Homer felt unnaturally aware of the slightest sounds. The crinkling turning of newspaper pages, even the slight stretching of ears to catch a neighbor's words, seemed to fill the air with layers of raucous noises.

George was disappointed that he hadn't raised Homer's ire. He enjoyed hearing Homer's tales of his domestic torment, although he had difficulty picturing the actual home scene. Homer was such a meek, little man, so careful, so cautious! Really, it was most unlike him to carry a large box on to a crowded street car where it might be sure to annoy people and therefore cause attention to himself.

Mrs. Appleton, from all report, was a large, obnoxious woman, whose tongue clattered all day and all night. Homer claimed that even his sleep was disturbed by this woman, who would pick the middle of the night to remember some daytime grievance—perhaps Homer had left his dirty socks on the bedroom floor—and wake Homer to scold him about it. Homer had an odd way of always referring to

her as Mrs. Appleton, never my wife, or Abigail, which was her given name.

Homer probably would like to put her in a box at that, George reflected. She couldn't be too large, though, if she fits in that box, he continued morbidly, then caught himself up. Oh, what nonsense! But what *was* in the box? George's curiosity matched his cheerfulness, but he wasn't one to repeat a question.

The street car arrived at the stop near the library. Homer had to bump his way through a whole row of protesting passengers to get off.

Miss Lapper and Mrs. Ames were already at their tables, shrouded in grimy smocks and surrounded by piles of folio volumes, when George and Homer came in the room.

Both ladies noted the box at once. After all, it was so large to be lugging about in the morning. But they said nothing about it. At first, that is.

Miss Lapper was a thin, angular woman of uncertain age. She affected an air of prim severity, which suited her station as a spinster who would certainly never have considered marriage under any conditions. She therefore did not pity Homer for his matrimonial trials. To her mind, Homer had made his bed and now he must lie in it. The more thorny the bed proved, the more adamant was her

point that it was a mistake to marry in the first place. She hugged her single state primly and contemplated Homer's unhappiness with serenity.

Mrs. Ames, on the other hand, was overflowingly plump. Her smock appeared to be inflated with air like a bulbous balloon. She had been married twenty years and she judged the state of marriage as equal to the nature of all experience. In her terms, it was quite impossible to be experienced without being married. Thus she regarded Homer merely as a traveler garnering experience as he trudged down the highway of life with his chosen companion.

Nevertheless the box disturbed both Miss Lapper and Mrs. Ames. There it sat beneath Homer's coat hung on a hook over the door. They could not look up from the books without seeing it. Homer, it was obvious, was ignoring it, for his typewriter clicked busily on, and his fingers scurried over the pages, noting the collations. They did notice that George Rhodes grinned whenever he glanced to-

ward the box, but George smiled at practically anything.

At ten the four cataloguers rose from their tables and went to the tiny kitchen for tea. One of their odd social customs was that the men were always called by their first names, and the women were always spoken to more formally.

They sat around the small table.

"How odd," Mrs. Ames began in her full voice, "that we always drink tea here. I drink coffee at home."

"So do I," tripped in Miss Lapper. This was the species of conversation they usually followed at their tea.

"Are you going to the post office at noon, Homer?" Miss Lapper inquired. She thought herself very subtle.

"No," said Homer.

Miss Lapper could not think of a further searching question.

"Maybe you'll go after work?" Mrs. Ames suggested.

"No, I don't think so." Homer seemed puzzled. Mrs. Ames remembered there was no tag or label on the box.

George could not resist a joke at the expense of the ladies' complacency. "Guess what's in Homer's box?" he said, chortling at their response.

The two ladies simply could not imagine what might be in the box. After all, Miss Lapper reflected acidly, it was none of their business. Surely one should be able to carry a box to work without the whole staff questioning him.

"His wife," George almost yelled with glee. "The wonderful Mrs. Appleton."

Miss Lapper was scandalized. Such jokes were in very poor taste. Really, you would think you would be safe from this kind of thing in a rare book library. "Oh, George," she said primly, "that really isn't very amusing."

Mrs. Ames was not amused, just skeptical. In her wide experience she just wouldn't have been surprised at much of anything between husbands and wives. She only balked at the thought of Homer doing such a thing. He simply didn't have it in him. And yet, and yet—she remembered poor Florrie Johnson, hadn't her husband up and shot her in the middle of the night? But not Homer. Homer's role was to remain meek, vaguely acquiescent—complaining, yes, but hardly in a rage. She tried to imagine Homer in a rage but was unsuccessful.

"In pieces," Homer said quietly.

There was a moment of total silence; then George roared off in his customary braying laughter.

The two ladies glanced at each other and rose. They rinsed their cups at the sink and returned to their tables a little early. Both became immediately immersed in their folios. Miss Lapper was star-

tled to find that her fingers shook slightly.

The two men came back in the room. Homer looked a bit sheepish. And well he might, thought Mrs. Ames. It wasn't in his character to say such crude things. She did ponder what Mrs. Appleton had been up to to cause Homer to engage in such a vicious fantasy.

There was an odd atmosphere in the room—an unspoken strain, stemming from different sources. George thought perhaps he had gone too far; Homer seemed ashamed of himself. Miss Lapper obviously highly disapproved of them both, and Mrs. Ames was busy running the episode through the file of her experiences.

Noon came. They took off their smocks, washed their hands and faces of the fine brown powder and got out their paper bags of lunches. This was another custom. The men always retired to the small kitchen, and the two women ate in the catalogue room, clearing their tables for the food.

The women started to eat and chat about the weather. They dissected each sign of approaching spring as if it were news of fiery importance.

". . . and I thought I saw a robin yesterday morning," Miss Lapper was saying vaguely when Mrs. Ames interrupted her.

"I think I'd better call his wife," she said sternly.

"Oh, surely," Miss Lapper began uncertainly, "surely there's nothing wrong. You know how men talk."

Mrs. Ames gave her a look to indicate that Miss Lapper had no idea how men talked. How could she really? "Well, just to check and see that everything's all right. It would set my mind at ease."

"But what would you say? I mean you must have a reason to call. She'll think Homer is sick or something like that."

"I'll ask her to come to a party," Mrs. Ames decided boldly.

"Oh, are you giving a party?"

"Of course not. That's just to have an excuse. If she says yes, I'll have to call again and say my husband is sick and the party's off," Mrs. Ames improvised rapidly. "It's the only right thing to do."

"Well, if you think so." Miss Lapper was glad it wasn't left up to her.

Mrs. Ames marched dramatically to the telephone book. "Here it is. I'll just ring her up before the men come back." She started dialing. A moment later she said, "There's a busy signal."

"Well, that must mean she's home," Miss Lapper defined.

"Not necessarily," announced Mrs. Ames. "The phone might be off the hook." She tried again ten minutes later. "Still a busy signal. I think I'll call the operator."

"Oh, Mrs. Ames, do you really think you should? Ten minutes isn't long for a conversation."

But Mrs. Ames was already asking the operator to check the number. She hung up the receiver with satisfaction. "She says the phone is off the hook; nobody is speaking on that line."

Even Miss Lapper was perturbed at this turn.

"Maybe we could try a neighbor?" she suggested. "But how? We don't know who they are."

Mrs. Ames sifted through her experience for a way to cope with the situation. She providentially remembered a similar case. "I know. We call the operator and tell her we think somebody's sick at this number and can't use the phone, and ask her for a number near that address."

She had no sooner made her plan than she put it in operation. "Tell me if the men start coming back," she ordered the reluctant Miss Lapper, who stationed herself at the door.

Mrs. Ames had just gathered the information from a neighbor that she had not seen Mrs. Appleton all day, in fact she had been puzzled when she didn't come over for coffee as she did every morning, and she would check and call back, when Miss Lapper signalled frantically that the men were returning. The two women went back to their seats.

Precisely then the phone rang. The two women made simultaneous guilty starts. George picked up the receiver.

"It's for you, Mrs. Ames," he said, holding it out.

It seemed to Mrs. Ames that the woman's voice was a foghorn penetrating every corner of the room. But apparently the others really could not hear.

Miss Lapper heard Mrs. Ames say, "Oh, really. Nobody at home, you say. Oh, she probably went shopping. Oh, she never does? Oh, yes, well, that was very kind of you. We'll see." On that enigmatic note she hung up. Homer was oblivious to the conversation, although George looked curious.

The afternoon wore on drearily. At three they all again rose for tea. Mrs. Ames made her cup and then said, "I have such a headache! I think I'll have my cup in the room." She swept out of the kitchen, giving Miss Lapper a significant look.

Miss Lapper could think of no convincing excuse. "I guess I'll keep Mrs. Ames company," she said lamely and followed her.

In the kitchen George prepared to hear the latest of Mrs. Appleton's tirades. For it was usually at the three o'clock tea when Homer opened up.

"Do you know what Mrs. Appleton said last night?" Homer began quietly.

George averred that he did not know.

"Well, you know we eat only vegetable juices now."

George knew all about the car-

rot and pepper juice. Mrs. Appleton had recently begun a strict regime of foods she deemed fit for consumption.

"Well," Homer continued conversationally, "she announced that we must sleep ten hours each night and that I can't read past eight o'clock."

What a strange woman Mrs. Appleton must be, thought George.

"She takes the fuses out," said Homer.

"She does what?" George asked, startled in spite of himself.

"She takes out all the fuses for the lights, so I can't see to read."

George didn't believe it. "She can't do that. She'd turn off all the electricity, your refrigerator and everything."

"Oh, she knows which fuses go to which things."

Well, maybe it was possible. If appliances and lights were on different fuses. But George was unwilling to conceive that Mrs. Appleton would go that far.

"She hid the flashlights, too," Homer added miserably.

"Well, did you go to bed?" George asked, uncomfortably aware that these assertions had the genuine ring of truth.

"Oh, yes, I went to bed all right, but then I got up and I—" They both looked at the clock in the kitchen and got up.

"Well, don't let her get you down, old fellow." George patted Homer on the shoulder as they went back to work. It didn't seem very funny any more.

Meanwhile in the catalogue room the two women had had an animated conversation, barely touching their tea.

"I think we should call the police," said Mrs. Ames firmly.

"The police. Oh, dear. But we don't have any evidence," Miss Lapper nervously pointed out.

"Well, the woman's not at home. And the neighbor says that not once in thirty years has she done different than come in for her morning coffee with her. And we have the box." She pointed triumphantly to it.

"Yes, the box. But don't you think it must just have clothes or something like that in it?"

"No, I don't. Homer never carries anything to work. Why would he bring that huge thing all the way across town on a street car?"

Miss Lapper tried to insert the point that it wasn't their business but Mrs. Ames had made up her mind and her mind was a very strong one.

"If the police don't find anything, then no damage done. We'll have done our civic duty. And our humane one," Mrs. Ames added eloquently. "Think of the poor woman."

"But she's probably perfectly all right." Miss Lapper could be perversely stubborn despite her quiet demeanor.

"Well, I'll just give them a ring.

The police have ways of finding out things without bothering people. And," she repeated loftily, "if they don't find anything, then no damage done."

Miss Lapper thought a great deal of damage would have been done, but she bowed to Mrs. Ames, who felt she had mastered a bad situation.

She had made her call by the time all four were again bent over their tables.

Around five, just as they were getting ready to leave for the day, a young policeman appeared in the doorway. This particular man had been sent because the call from Mrs. Ames had been obviously that of a crank.

In his short career as a policeman, the young man had already been demoted once for sheer inability. He was famous in the force for the blunders he had made in interviews with suspects.

Thus, with the characteristic bluntness which he was unable to overcome, he went immediately to George and said, "You Mr. Appleton?"

George was taken aback by what seemed almost an apparition, and pointed dumbly to Homer.

Homer said, "I'm Mr. Appleton."

Mrs. Ames and Miss Lapper were undergoing the first pangs of an enormous guilt attack.

The young man wheeled suddenly toward the door and pulled out the large box. "This the box?" he asked.

Nobody answered.

And then he said what would be repeated in the police force for the next generation. "Is your wife in this box?" he sternly inquired of Homer.

"Well, not all of her," Homer replied modestly.

"You'd better come with me," the policeman said. He had not expected this reply and did not quite know what to do.

Homer got his coat, picked up the box and started out the door. His three co-workers went to the main door and watched him pick his way down all the marble steps and place himself carefully in the waiting police car. The three did not speak to each other but started home separately as rapidly as they could manage.

The next morning Miss Lapper, Mrs. Ames and George Rhodes converged upon the old library building exactly on the dot of nine. Under the arms of each was tucked the identical newspaper. In the eyes of each was an identical expression of horror.

They sat down at the tables and started to work without saying a word. Mrs. Ames was trying hard to fit this last event into her experience, Miss Lapper was trying to forget it, and George was trying to stop an endless voice in his ear which kept murmuring, *"not all of her, not all of her, not all of her."*

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